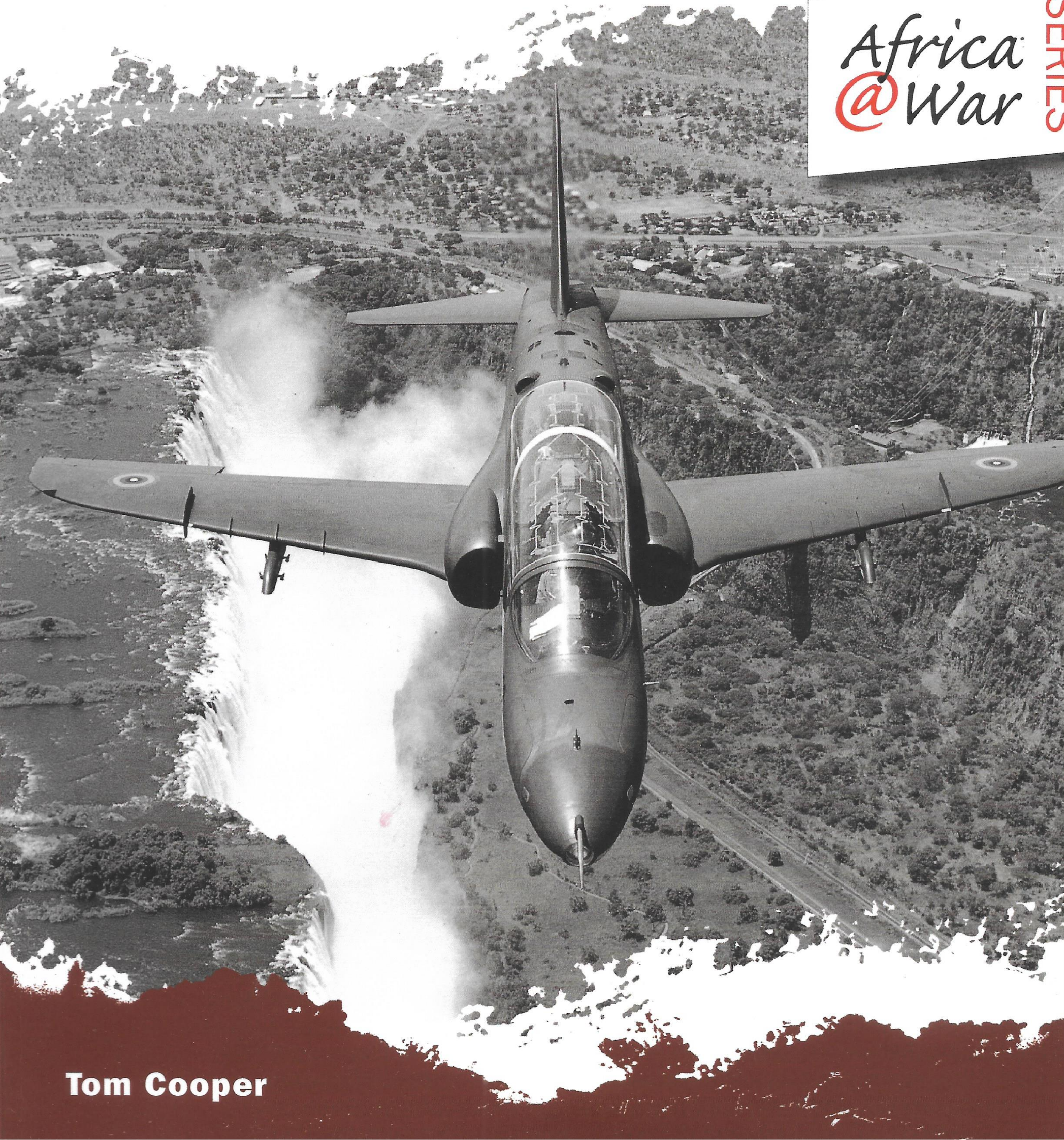
Africa@War Volume 14

GREAT LAKES CONFLAGRATION

The Second Congo War, 1998–2003

Africa @War SERIES



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Front cover: The performance of Hawk Mk 60s can be regarded as the symbol of the much unrecognized and often belittled Zimbabwean military success in the DRC. Although the AFZ never deployed more than four of these light strikers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the war, their presence and effectiveness in combat proved crucial to the outcome of every major battle. *Photo BAe*

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Zimbabwe
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Lesotho
South Africa

Note: In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas*, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of described events. Correspondingly, the term 'Congo' designates the area of the former Belgian colony of the Congo Free State, granted independence as the Democratic Republic of the Congo in June 1960 and in use until 1971 when the country was renamed Republic of Zaire, which, in turn, reverted to Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997, and which remains in use today. As such, Congo is not to be mistaken for the former French colony of Middle Congo (Moyen Congo), officially named the Republic of the Congo on its independence in August 1960, also known as Congo-Brazzaville.

Abbreviations

AA	anti-aircraft
AAA	anti-aircraft artillery
AB	Agusta-Bell (Italian–American helicopter manufacturers)
AdA	*Armée de l'Air* (French Air Force)
ADCC	Air Defence Consultants Corporation (Israeli commercial military enterprise)
ADF	Allied Democratic Forces/Front (armed opposition group in Uganda since 1990s)
AFB	Air Force Base
AFDL	*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, Rwandan-supported insurgent organization in Zaire, 1996–97)
AFZ	Air Force of Zimbabwe
An	Antonov (the design bureau led by Oleg Antonov)
ANC	*Armée Nationale Congolaise* (Congolese National Army, 1960–71)
ANR	*Agence Nationale de Renseignements* (National Intelligence Agency, DRC)
ANT	*Armée Nationale Tchadienne* (Chadian National Army)
APC	armoured personnel carrier
AT-14 Spriggan	ASCC, codename for Vikhr, Soviet-/Russian-made ATGM
ATGM	anti-tank guided missile
BAC	British Aircraft Corporation
BAe	British Aerospace
CAP	combat air patrol
CASA	*Construcciones Aeronáuticas SA* (Spanish aircraft manufacturer)
CBU	cluster bomb unit
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
C-in-C	commander-in-chief
c/n	construction number
CO	commanding officer
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSP	*Division Présidentiel Special* (Special Presidential Division, FAZ)
ECM	electronic countermeasures
ELINT	electronic intelligence
ENI	*Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi* (Italian state-owned petroleum company)
EO	Executive Outcomes (South African commercial military enterprise)
FAA	*Forças Armadas Angolanas* (Angolan military, since 1992)
FAC	*Forces Armées Congolaises* (Congolese Armed Forces, since 1997)
FANA	*Força Aérea Nacional* (Angolan Air Force, since 1992)
FAR	*Forces Armées Rwandaise* (Rwandan Armed Forces, 1962–94)
FARDC	*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (Armed Forces of the DRC, since July 2003, formerly FAC)
FAZ	*Forces Armées Zaïroise* (Zairian Army, 1971–1996)
FAZA	*Force Aérienne Zaïroise* (Zairian Air Force, 1971–96)
FDD	*Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (Forces for the Defence of Democracy, armed opposition group in Burundi, 1990s/2000s)
FDLR	*Forces Dmocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (*Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda)
FIM-92A	US-made MANPADS (full designation FIM-92A Stinger)
FNLA	*Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola* (National Front for the Liberation of Angola, armed group opposing Portuguese rule in Angola 1960–75, later fighting against the MPLA government in 1970s/80s)
FNLC	*Front National pour la Libération du Congo* (National Front for the Liberation of the Congo, insurgent organization in Zaire/Congo, 1990s)
GCI	ground controlled interception
GP	general purpose (bomb)
IAI	Israeli Aircraft Industries (since 2006 Israeli Aerospace Industries)
IAP	international airport
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
IFF	identification friend or foe
Il	Ilyushin (the design bureau led by Sergey Vladimirovich Ilyushin, also known as OKB-39)
IP	instructor pilot
IR	infrared, electromagnetic radiation, longer than deepest red light sensed as heat
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army (armed opposition group in Uganda)
MAGRIVI	*Mutuelle des Agriculteurs des Virunga* (Famers' Society of Virunga)
MANPADS	Man-Portable Air Defence System(s) (light surface-to-air missile system that can be carried and deployed in combat by a single soldier
MBT	main battle tank
MHz	megahertz, millions of cycles per second
Mi	Mil (Soviet/Russian helicopter designer and manufacturer)
MiG	*Mikoyan i Gurevich* (the design bureau led by Artyom Ivanovich Mikoyan and Mikhail Iosifovich Gurevich, also known as OKB-155 or MMZ 'Zenit')
MILAN	*Missile d'infanterie léger antichar* (French- made ATGM)
MLC	Movement for the Liberation of Congo (armed opposition group in central DRC, late 1990s)
MNC-K	*Mouvement National Congolais/Minoritaire–Kalonji* (Congolese National Movement/Minority–Kalonji, insurgent organization in Zaire/Congo, 1990s)
MNC-L	*Mouvement National Congolais/Minoritaire–Lumumba* (Congolese National Movemement–Lumumba, insurgent organization in Zaire/Congo, 1990s)
MoD	ministry of defence
MPLA	*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, leftist anti-colonial movement in Angola during the 1960s and 1970s; later ruling party of Angola)
MPR	*Mouvement Populaire de la Révoultion* (Popular Movement of the Revolution, Mobutu's political party)
NAF	Namibian Air Force (formerly the Namibian Defence Force/Air Wing)
Nav/attack	used for navigation and to aim weapons against surface targets
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NDF/AW	Namibian Defence Force/Air Wing

NL	*Namibiese Lugmag* (Afrikaans for the unofficial designation often used for Namibian Air Force in everyday communication)
NRA	National Resistance Army (insurgent organization in Uganda, 1981–85)
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OCU	operational conversion unit
ORBAT	order of battle
PMC	private military company
PRP	People's Revolutionary Party (insurgent organization in Zaire, 1980s)
RCD	*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (insurgent organization in DRC, 1998–2003)
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army (military wing of the RPF, 1987–94, and official designation of the Rwandan military, 1994–2002)
RDF	Rwanda Defence Forces (official designation since 2002)
RDF/AF	Rwanda Defence Force/Air Force
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front (insurgent organization in Uganda and Rwanda, 1987–94)
RHAW	radar homing and warning system
RWR	radar warning receiver
SA-2 Guideline	ASCC, codename for S-75 Dvina, Soviet SAM system
SA-6 Gainful	ASCC, codename for ZRK-SD Kub/Kvadrat, Soviet SAM system
SA-7 Grail	ASCC, codename for 9K32 Strela-2, Soviet MANPADS
SA-14 Gremlin	ASCC, codename for 9M36 Strela-3, Soviet MANPADS
SA-16 Gimlet	ASCC, codename for 9M313 Igla-1, Soviet MANPADS
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SARM	*Service d'Action et de Renseignement Militaire* (Zairian Military Intelligence Bureau)
SNIP	*Service National d'Intelligence et Protection* (National Service for Intelligence and Protection, top Zairian intelligence agency)
Su	Sukhoi (the design bureau led by Pavel Ossipowich Sukhoi, also known as OKB-51)
TAM	Tbilisi Aerospace Manufacturing (Georgian aircraft manufacturing company)
TASA	Tbilisi Aircraft State Association (Georgian aircraft manufacturing company)
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNITA	*Uniao Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, armed group opposing Portuguese rule in the 1960s and 1970s, then opposing the MPLA until 2003)
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
USAF	United States Air Force
WNBF	West Nile Bank Front (armed opposition group in Uganda in 1990s/2000s)
ZDF	Zimbabwe Defence Forces
ZNA	Zimbabwe National Army

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

Origins of the campaign

As in the case of the First Congo War, 1996–1997, at the heart of the Second Congo War was again the unfinished, eight-year-old Rwandan civil war which began in 1990 by the assault of the predominantly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (PRF) against the government of Hutu president, Juvenal Habyarimana. This conflict reached its bloody climax with the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and the subsequent RPF conquest of the country. After their defeat, the forces of the former Hutu extremists (including remnants of the former Rwandan military, the so-called ex-FAR or *Forces Armées Rwandaise* and the Interhamwe militia) fled to eastern Zaire – as the Congo was officially named from 1971 to 1997 – together with much of the Rwandan Hutu population, from whence they attempted to continue the war against the newly installed Tutsi government. In 1996, Rwanda invaded the DRC in an attempt to secure final victory. After forcefully repatriating around one third of the Hutu refugees and massacring another third, Kigali was forced to realize that a large part of the Hutu extremists had fled – with the last third of the refugees – deep into central Congo. By organizing a quasi-insurgency of Congolese Tutsis and a number of political opponents of the government of President Mobutu Sese Seko – named the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo*, AFDL) – the Rwandans then launched a pursuit that brought them all the way to Kinshasa, where they toppled the government and installed the former Maoist-cum-wealthy businessman Laurent Désiré Kabila as the new president of the country, which was then renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

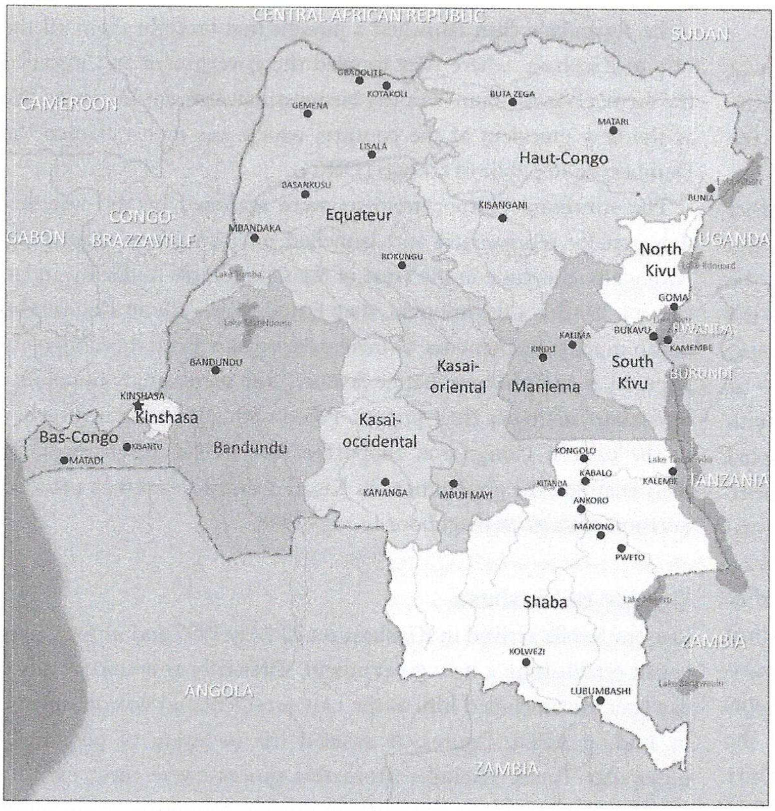
The surviving Hutu extremists were scattered by the war, but they rapidly reorganized and launched an insurgency against the Rwandans, this time in the areas of the Congo now under Rwandan control. Within a few months, they found a new ally in Kabila who began supporting them due to increased pressure from the Congolese population complaining that he favoured the increasingly unpopular Rwandans, acting as their puppet. Faced with a growing insurgency in the eastern Congo and support of the Kabila government for their enemies, the government in Kigali decided to attempt a second invasion of its giant neighbour in mid-1998.

Trouble in Kinshasa

Laurent Kabila arrived in Kinshasa on 23 May 1997 and immediately began establishing a new government. Officially announced only a day later, this included him as the new president and was dominated by leading AFDL figures. It avoided the inclusion of potentially unpopular Tutsis. Excluded from this process were most existing political parties, those established during Mobutu's reign, most notably the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (*Union pour la Démocratie et le Progès Social*, UPDS) led by Étienne Tshisekedi, the Unified Lumumbist Party (*Parti Lumumbiste Unifié*, PALU) led by Antoine Gizenga, and the Front for the Survival of Democracy in Congo (*Front pour la Survie de la Démocratie au Congo*, FSDC), who refused to recognize the new government and called on the people to reject it. The first demonstrations in Kinshasa occurred only hours after Kabila officially announced his government and declared the Democratic Republic of Congo on 24 May 1997. Without a political base in the country, without a military or democratic background, Kabila knew no other way to react but through violence. He deployed his troops to disperse the demonstrators. Dozens were arrested and subsequently tortured. The new president then issued a decree prohibiting all political activity except for the AFDL. When this failed to quieten the opposition Kabila's newly established security forces were deployed to directly target opposition leaders and activists, hitting PALU in particular. Hundreds of political opponents were arrested and tortured and dozens were murdered.

While South Africa, followed by Angola, Rwanda, Burundi, Libya and Zimbabwe had already recognized the new Democratic Republic of Congo, by 20 May 1997, the USA and most European countries were slower in doing so, cautiously waiting for official notification before recognizing Zaire's new name and government. At the same time, they imposed strict conditions on the fledgling state, including the democratization and liberalization of the economy, as prerequisites for the provision of financial aid. This prompted suspicion within the ranks of Kabila's inexperienced administration that found itself unqualified to solve the problems and chaos left by Mobutu. Kabila's promise of elections was not taken seriously and there was little understanding of the complex process of organizing an entirely new state under the given conditions. Instead, his political opponents maintained that he suppressed dissent in an attempt to hold onto power indefinitely.

With hindsight it is easy to place the blame for the troubles in the DRC of 1997 on Kabila and his administration. One should keep in mind that this huge country was already in a bad way when he took power. Aside from the widespread chaos and the presence of foreign troops, various insurgent groups, militias and armed bands, civil authorities and security infrastructures had collapsed. While most of the former government and its military (as well as many foreigners) were attempting to flee, others began plotting against Kabila. Major airports and roads were either totally ruined or in urgent need of repair. Other means of communication were practically non-existent, there was lack of fuel, and agriculture and industry was either already in ruin or in the process of being usurped by the Rwandans, the Ugandans and their foreign supporters. Although officially president and thus considered to represent all 60 million Congolese inhabitants, Kabila's control was actually restricted to a few major towns, including Kinshasa, Kikwit, Mbandaka, Kananga, Mbuji-Mayi, Kolwezi and Lubumbashi, the port of Matadi and the Inga hydroelectric dam. But even these were secured by entirely inadequate contingents of AFDL insurgents, mostly under the command of various RDF officers, none of whom had experience in operating civil services. The Kivus remained under Rwandan control and most of the Haut Congo and Equateur provinces were under Ugandan control. Except for brutally suppressing political opposition, the AFDL and its Rwandan commanders, as well as all the units of the Rwandan Patriotic Army present in the country, proved interested rather in pursuing and massacring Rwandan Hutu refugees (and any Congolese civilians they suspected of helping them), looting and raping, than in maintaining freedom and security. This is not to say that the Rwandans and Kabila's security services were the only ones acting in this fashion. During June and July 1997 the troops of the Angolan Armed Forces (*Forças Armadas Angolanas*, FAA) – deployed in the country in support of the AFDL since February/March 1997 – launched a similar crackdown on Angolan separatists among the refugees from the Cabinda enclave – many of whom had fought against the government in Luanda in the 1980s – primarily in the province of Bas-Congo. Exactly how many people were arrested or disappeared in the DRC between June 1997 and August 1998, remains unknown. Unsurprisingly, the population soon began to regard their new authorities with much suspicion.



The Democratic Republic of Congo.

Another persistent problem for the new administration was the lack of money. The several lucrative foreign mining concessions financing the Rwandans and the AFDL could not support the entire country. With the majority of the state-controlled mines in derelict condition, and other mines under foreign control, the new administration found itself without dependable sources of income, while having to service an inherited debt of between US$14–16 billion. Mobutu had died in September 1997 in Morocco but his astronomical private slush fund remained out of the new government's grasp.

Surrounded by opponents while trying to secure his position, establish control over the country, get the economy into order and deflect criticism for his favouritism of Rwandan Tutsis, Kabila began appointing family members to crucial political and economic positions, and entering alliances with various parties and companies at odds with his supporters in Kigali. Slowly at first, but unfailingly, his decisions began to turn most of his former allies into outright enemies.

Angolan troops relish their victorious advance into eastern Zaire/ Congo in May 1997. Immediately after participating in the overthrow of Mobutu's government, FAA units became involved in mass atrocities against Angolan separatists from the Cabinda enclave. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

Much of the Congo, especially the east of the country, was in turmoil in 1997/98. The movement of masses of refugees from Rwanda, Burundi and Angola, as well as internally displaced people, was the norm. *Photo Mark Lepko*

CHAPTER TWO:

MILITARY FORCES OF THE CONGOLESE GOVERNMENT AND ITS ALLIES

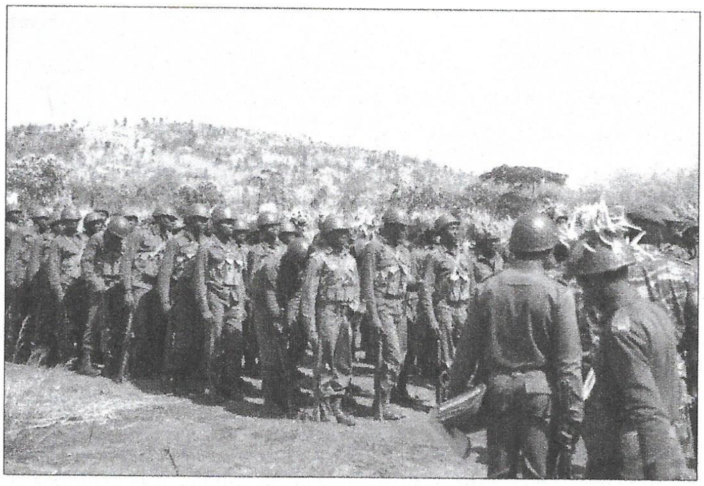
The Second Congo War was not only a civil war between the government of President Laurent Désiré Kabila and a rabble of different insurgent movements, but also a chaotic cocktail of other people's wars that saw a major collision between two regional African alliances – the Great Lakes Alliance (Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda), pitted against members of the Southern African Development Community, namely Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Except for insurgent organizations that sided with Kabila's government and operated well behind enemy lines for most of the war, the majority of the anti-Kabila insurgents received lukewarm to no support from the local population, showed little combat effectiveness and proved not only heavily dependent on support from their foreign donors but solely dependent on them for their naked survival. Thus, while it appeared as though foreign military powers occupied most of the country, the majority of these forces were only active along the front lines or maintaining control of the major mining areas, while the insurgents were left to maintain control of the rear areas. This resulted in a situation where most of the fighting during the Second Congo War was done by foreign contingents. This chapter provides an insight into the forces that sided with Kabila's government.

Congo: reorganization of the military

One of the mammoth tasks facing the AFDL administration in Kinshasa was the reorganization of the military and all other security services. This was by no means easy, as the new government not only lacked the necessary money, but also the necessary cadres. It had to make a decision about what to do with what was left of the former Zairian Armed Forces (*Forces Armées Zairoise*, FAZ) and then turn its own, now former, insurgent supporters – around 18,000 fighters by late 1997, the majority of them teenagers or so-called *kadogo* (Swahili for 'short ones') – into properly trained soldiers, and assigned to disciplined and effective units.

The issue of the former FAZ troops was dealt with in entirely the wrong fashion and without a thought for the consequences. As they advanced from the Kivus toward Kinshasa in the second quarter of 1997, the Rwandans and AFDL insurgents occupied military bases. The local FAZ units were disarmed and their officers and other ranks arrested and put into detention camps. Most officers, NCOs and soldiers associated with units such as the former Zairian Military Intelligence Bureau (*Service d'Action et de Renseignement Militaire*, SARM), Special Presidential Division (*Division Présidentiel Special*, DPS) or the Civil Guard were summarily executed, often in public, during late May 1997. The following month, the new government began moving large contingents of imprisoned ex-FAZ troops to the Kitona air force base (AFB), near the Atlantic coast, where they were to undergo training in ideology and re-education. Eventually, between 30,000 and 35,000 ex-FAZ officers, NCOs and soldiers from all over the country were herded together into barracks that could barely accommodate 10,000 and were in an advanced state of disrepair.

They were held there under terrible conditions, lacking food and medical care. Summary execution, torture and submission were the order of the day. The situation only began improving in late 1997 when some of the soldiers were dispatched to serve with the newly established units across the country. What they experienced in their former bases did little to please them. Constructed in the manner of western barracks, many of the sprawling ex-FAZ military installations included extensive housing facilities for families of officers and other ranks. What is little known is that when the Rwandans and AFDL insurgents occupied these bases, they felt at liberty to rape thousands of the ex-FAZ soldiers' wives and daughters, as well as women randomly arrested in surrounding towns. Therefore, dissent and mistrust within much of the military was practically pre-programmed.



Thousands of well-trained ex-FAZ officers and soldiers (seen here in the 1980s) were sent to 're-education' camps in their former bases, the most notorious being situated at Kamina AFB, near the Atlantic coast. Due to the heinous nature of their re-education, it required an almost implausible measure of patriotism for them to side with Kabila's government and oppose the Rwandan and Ugandan invasion. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

KIGALI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

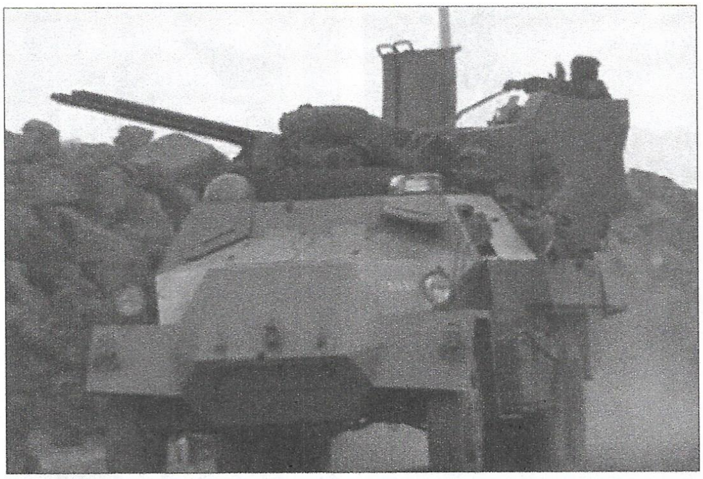
The mastermind of the 1996/97 Rwandan invasion of Zaire, James Kabarebe (centre) was put in overall command of the newly established FAC in September 1997 and later even appointed the DRC's minister of defence. At left is US Army General Ward. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

Command and control over the armed forces and security services in the first few months of Kabila's rule was vague, if at all. Initially, there was no minister of defence, no chief of staff and no ranks. The situation began changing only in September 1997, when the new Congolese Armed Forces (*Forces Armées Congolaises*, FAC) was established, but even then the RPA had to deploy none other than its top commander, James Kabarebe – one of Paul Kagame's closest aides, then minister of defence in Rwanda and mastermind of the 1996 invasion of Zaire – to serve as the acting chief of staff and later as minister of defence, to bring the new military in hand.

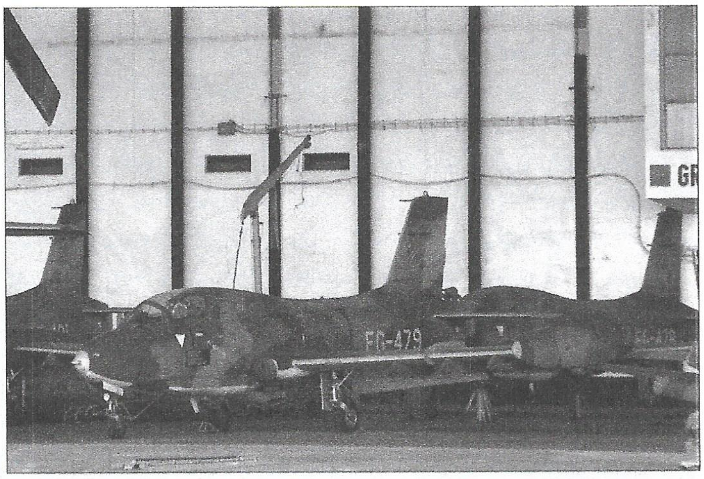
Kabarebe's job was by no means easy, and it remains questionable if he in fact attempted to complete it to the full advantage of the Congolese authorities. His attempt to mix and organize the former Banyamulenge insurgents (trained by foreign private military companies, or PMCs, in Rwanda, 1995/96,), former AFDL *kadogo* (recruited and trained by Rwandans in eastern Zaire in early 1997), former FNLC insurgents (trained by Angolans and Zambians in the 1980s and 1990s) and ex-FAZ personnel, into cohesive units dispersed over a massive country, could doubtfully have succeeded. Almost no AFDL cadres, and even less so their RDF supervisors, spoke French or Lingala, the predominant languages spoken by the former FAZ. Instead they spoke Kinyarwanda, Swahili and English (even Kabarebe spoke only Swahili and broken English at that time). No French or any other of language the Congolese generally understood was universal among them. At least as important is that Kabarebe's view of his task, as the FAC chief of staff, was to ready the new army as soon as possible for a deployment against the surviving Hutu extremists who had already begun reorganizing and implementing a new insurgency against Rwandan dominance.

In a rush to get the FAC operational, the Rwandans left the FAC to be trained by a mix of foreign instructors that can only be described as exotic. Units based in the Kivus received training from the RPA, those in Haut-Congo from North Koreans, while units in Kinshasa and the Bas-Congo were trained by Chinese, Tanzanian, North Korean and Rwandan instructors. The result was internal tension and ethnic rivalry, a lack of cohesion, poor military skills and no recognizable military doctrine within the 16 brigades known to have been constituted, or in the process of being assembled, as of August 1998, as shown in Table 1 on the facing page. Although taking over all the heavy equipment left behind by the FAZ, including a total of around 30 intact Type-59 main battle tanks (MBTs) and Type-62 light tanks, the FAC lacked not only crews trained to operate them, but also gunners for heavy artillery, mortars and multiple-rocket launchers (MLRs). Only one weak company equipped with Type-59 MBTs and Casspir mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs) was available for the defence of Kinshasa. One other company, equipped with Type-62 light tanks, was deployed in Kisangani in August 1998. The former was subsequently redeployed to Gbadolite, where it supported a Chadian counteroffensive against Uganda in January 1999, while the latter was taken over by Rwandans in August 1998. The situation gradually improved during early 1999, when Angolans, Namibians and Zimbabweans established and trained a number of new battalions and brigades using newly purchased equipment. The first of these, the 5th Mechanized Brigade, became operational at Kamina AFB in March that year. It was followed by the re-establishment of the 10th Brigade (123 officers and 2,600 other ranks), trained by Zimbabweans, Namibians and North Koreans, which became operational in October 1999.

The new Congolese military had no air force and no navy. While at least eight Aermacchi MB.326G and MB.326K jet trainers and light strikers were still intact, all were stored at the military cantonment of N'Djili IAP, and had been inoperable for years. Four SIAI-Marchetti SF.260 turboprop trainers were found stored at Kamina AFB. At Gbadolite airport there were two intact and one sabotaged Mi-24s, but no pilots, ground crew, spares, lubricants or fuel. The five MiG-21 supersonic interceptors and fighter-bombers were never completely assembled and, left in the open and exposed to elements, their condition rapidly deteriorated, while three Jastreb and Galeb light strikers Zaire had obtained from the former Yugoslavia, were sabotaged by Serbian personnel. During mid-1998, there were attempts to overhaul one of the MB.326s and two SF.260s. A South African company was contracted for this purpose and these aircraft, as well as two intact Mi-24s, were brought to N'Djili IAP, but the work was still ongoing in August 1998. Furthermore, while three Lockheed C-130Hs (9T-TCA, 9T-TCB and the now 9T-TCC, formerly 9T-TCG), one DHC-5D Buffalo, two Douglas C-47s and



When and how this Czechoslovakian-built M53/59 Praga self-propelled anti-aircraft gun (with a twin 30mm cannon) – obtained either from Serbia, Slovakia or Libya – reached the Congo, remains unknown, but the vehicle survived long enough to be seen in service in the Goma area in 2012. Like in so many other cases, the newly established FAC was outfitted with whatever armament and equipment could be purchased around the world, primarily Eastern Europe. *Photo via EsotericArmour.Blogspot.com*

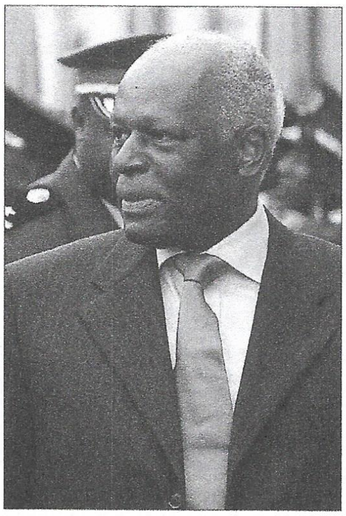


Three Aeromacchi MB.326Ks seen stored inside a hangar at N'Djili IAP (here already wearing the latest FAC fin-flash introduced in 2002/03). Purchased from Italy in the 1970s and 1980s, these aircraft were inoperable and most of their pilots were forced to emigrate before the First Congo War. Despite this, and the availability of huge stocks of related spares and weapons, they were never used to constitute a new Congolese Air Force. *Photo Bundeswehr*

Table 1: *Forces Armées Congolaises*, August 1998

Unit	HQ/Base	Remarks
Presidential Guards Brigade	Kibomango Training Centre (Kinshasa)	CO Joseph Kabila, in the process of training by North Koreans and Tanzanians, including a company of Type-59 MBTs and Type-62 light tanks and an infantry company equipped with Wolf Turbo MRAPs
3rd Brigade	Base unknown	Base unknown. In the process of establishment and training but defected to the RCD in early August 1998
5th Mechanized Brigade	Kamina	In the process of training 1998, officially established 8 March 1999
6th Brigade	Karangera	In the process of establishment and training
7th Brigade	Gikuku	In the process of establishment and training
9th Brigade	Base unknown	In the process of establishment and training
10th Commando Brigade	Goma (North Kivu)	CO Sylvain Mbuchi and XO Jean-Pierre Ondekane. Established in Kasai and deployed to Goma in September 1997. Completed training with the help of North Korean instructors. Was reinforced to 16,000 troops by August 1998, before the majority defected to the RCD. A new 10th Brigade was then established at Kitona in 1999
11th Brigade	Moba & Manolo	In the process of establishment and training. Defected to the RCD in early August 1998
12th Brigade	Bukavu (South Kivu)	CO Birunga Kamanda. Completed training but defected to the RCD in August 1998
13th Brigade	Tongo	No details available
15th Brigade	Masisi	No details available
20th Brigade	Kananga	CO Ilunga Kabambi and included 221 Battalion in Kananga and 222 Battalion in Bukavu
50th Brigade	Camp Kokolo (Kinshasa)	Completed training with the help of Tanzanian instructors in January 1998
81st Brigade	Nyabyondo	CO Laurent Nkunda. Status unclear but unit defected to the RCD in August 1998
85th Brigade	Bisie	Undergoing training in 1998 and became operational in 2002
Officer School/Training College (*Ecole de formation des officiers*)	Kananga	Running courses for officers and NCOs under Rwandan supervision

Although striving to present itself to the public as a well-organized armed force, the AFDL mainly consisted of child-soldiers or *kadogo*. They received little training and generally proved ineffective in combat, but, in Laurent Kabila's words, "they think it's a game and know no fear". This group was photographed in Kinshasa in late May 1997.



Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos had personal and political agendas in the DRC and remained deeply involved – and highly influential – in all developments in Kinshasa through the period 1998–2001. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

one of two former Serbian Antonov An-26s, were available, only the latter three were operational. Similarly, none out of the four SA 330 Pumas, one SA 332 Super Puma and seven SA 316B Alouette IIIs, left behind by the former FAZ, was operational. The navy suffered similarly, with most of its vessels useless, rusty hulks.

As such and as amply demonstrated during the first two years of the coming conflict the FAC was woefully unprepared for war, nor were its gross deficiencies rectified by the acquisition of significant quantities of new armament and equipment – primarily light infantry weapons from Eastern European sources – during 1998. Furthermore, it suffered similar mismanagement and ethnic rivalry as the former FAZ, even though soldiers were regularly paid. To make matters worse during the first few weeks of the war, the former AFDL-*Kagodo* suffered heavy losses and mass desertions of the Banyamulenge. Following this, the majority of the FAC units consisted of former Mobutu troops and Katangan Tigers. These two groups were the most unusual among all the Congolese fighters in this war due to the fact that all of them had received proper military training before the war. Even then, the leadership of the Katangan Tigers was divided between those who sided with Kabila (and were thus rewarded with powerful positions in exchange for their loyalty and services) and those who did not, many of whom – including General Jean Delphin Mulanda – were imprisoned, while others joined the Rwandan-supported mutiny or established their own insurgent groups.

PCD/PDF/PDG:
(Congolese) People's Defence Forces/Groups

Locally known as the *Défense Civile et Populaire* (People's Civil Defence, PCD), led by Colonel Dunia, this militia was created by Kabila in August/September 1998, primarily in the Bas-Congo and Kinshasa areas, and consisted of civilians who volunteered to support the government in the struggle against the Tutsi and Rwandan advance on the Congolese capital. While receiving no or next to no military training, the PCD became notorious for its pogrom of the Tutsi, not only in Kinshasa, but also in other major Congolese cities, in late 1998. Except in relation to units of the Mayi-Mayi militias it included, its subsequent participation in the war is largely unknown.

In November 1999, Kabila attempted to expand the PCD to a 20,000-strong paramilitary force, now officially designated the People's Defence Forces, and intended to support the FAC and the National Police. Although several minor units came into being and saw some combat deployment, overall, the PDF never became truly operational.

Southern African Development Community Allies

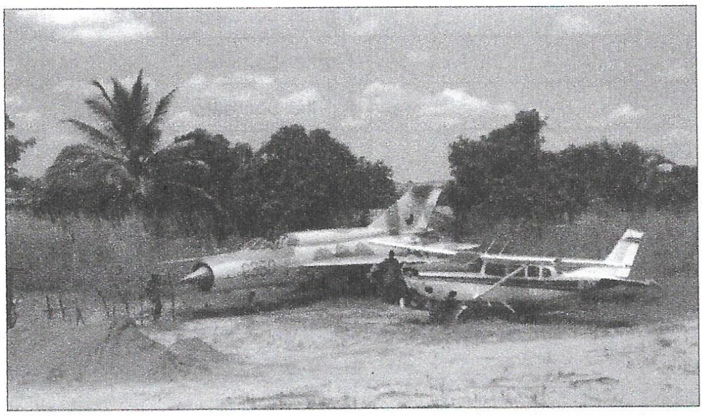
FAA: Angola

The involvement of Angola in the Second Congo War, potentially the Kabila government's strongest ally, came as a major surprise to Rwanda, and appears to have been influenced by direct and personal business interests of the government in Luanda (such as installing a monopoly on fuel supplies by the Angolan state-owned company Sonangol in the DRC), but also out of concern because of Rwandan ties to the Angolan UNITA insurgents.

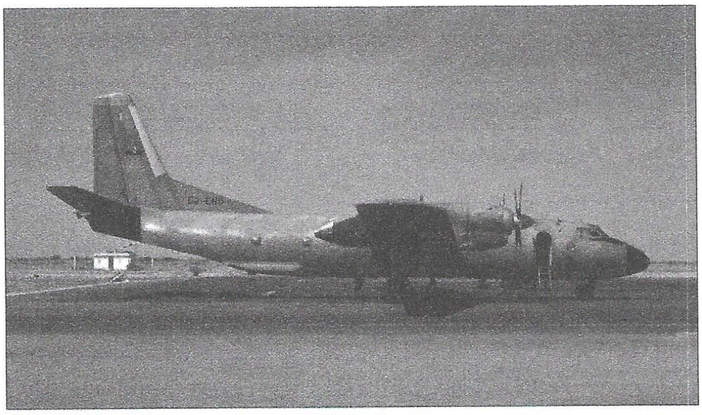
As of 1998, the Angolan Military Forces (*Forças Armadas de Angola*, FAA) were in the process of massive expansion. An almost uninterrupted civil war that had ravaged the country since 1975 – fought between the government of President Eduardo dos Santos and the insurgency of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (*Uniao Nacional para a Independència Total de Angola*, UNITA) – training and logistic support provided by several South African PMCs during the mid-1990s and an increasing income from extensive oil and diamond resources, had turned the FAA into a combat-proven army, equipped with around 150 MBTs, 150 APCs and infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) of Russian origin, supported by around 130 76mm and 130mm artillery pieces, roughly 75 122mm MLRs, over 200 anti-aircraft artillery pieces (including around 30 ZSU-23-4 self-propelled, radar-guided AA guns), a miscellany of anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), and an air-defence system leaning upon a well-developed radar network, but also a number of – yet inoperable – SA-2, SA-3 and SA-6 SAM sites.

An FAA infantry squad during a training session. Although unevenly distributed through the force, generally the training of Angolan troops improved markedly during the mid-1990s, heavily emphasizing integrated COIN operations, with some units receiving excellent training while others had to make do with next to none. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

The first company of MPLA paras during their graduation ceremony in 1976. Originally trained by Cubans in the mid-1970s, the quality of Angolan commando and paratroop units rose considerably during the mid-1990s, due to the contracting of South African PMCs, but also military cooperation with Portugal and other Western countries. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*



As of 1998, the FANA was one of most powerful air forces in Sub-Saharan Africa, equipped with more than 40 MiG-21, MiG-23, Su-22 and Su-25 fighter bombers. Therefore, availability of equipment was none of its problems – but that of qualified personnel was, which is why it frequently had to recruit foreign contract personnel. The Russian pilot of this MiG-21bis (serial C350) made an emergency landing in western Zaire in the mid-1990s, and the plane – wearing a camouflage pattern and markings typical for this period of time - was simply abandoned in situ. *Photo via Chuck Canyon*



One of most important parts of the FANA was its relatively large force of around 20 transport aircraft. This not only decreased the dependence of Angola to chartered civilian transports, but also enabled its air force to support the deployment of the Namibian and other contingents during the II Congo War. This picture shows one of at least four Antonov An-26s operated by the FANA during the late 1990s. *Photo Tom Cooper Collection*

Relatively little is known about the order of battle of the FAA contingent deployed in the DRC during the Second Congo War. Initially, it consisted of two brigade-sized tactical groups, each about 2,500 strong. One – including the 5th and 8th regiments (each including a company of T-55s and BMP-2-borne mechanized infantry) – advanced out of the Cabinda enclave, the other – including three unknown mechanized infantry regiments reinforced by a Namibian motorized company of 150 troops – advanced from Mbwanza Congo, in northern Angola. At least one additional mechanized group was deployed in the Katanga Province, primarily for the protection of Mbuji-Mayi, before the FAA's involvement was grossly reduced in 1999 because of the war against UNITA at home.

In general, FAA troops were poorly paid, but well trained, and well equipped with modern communication systems, and trained to call upon artillery and the air force for close support. The Rwandans considered them their most dangerous opponents and therefore attempted to keep Angola out of the war before invading the DRC. The major problem facing the FAA was its very inconsistent performance. Some of its units comprised highly experienced and battle-hardened professionals, while others possessed no combat readiness at all. Similarly, while all of them received extensive military education abroad (primarily in the former Soviet Union), some Angolan officers were excessively corrupt, while others proved their mettle in combat beyond doubt.

The Angolan Air Force (*Força Aérea Nacional*, FANA), was in relatively good shape during the mid-1990s. The majority of its combat and transport aircraft had been overhauled – some in the former Soviet bloc and some in Portugal. The FANA was equipped with around 25 medium and heavy transport aircraft, ranging from some eight older Antonov An-12s, at least four An-26s, to at least four Il-76 jets. Its combat units operated around a dozen Mi-24/25 helicopter gunships and around 30 Mi-8/17 assault and transport helicopters, some 14–16 Sukhoi Su-22 and Su-25 fighter-bombers, around 30 MiG-21bis and MiG-23ML fighter interceptors and a handful of Aero L-39 training jets that served as light strikers.

This expansion was as a result of intelligence reports received by Luanda regarding UNITA's extensive acquisitions of arms and equipment from the Ukraine, supposedly including very advanced T-64 MBTs and even MiG-23 interceptors from stocks of the

Table 2: *Força Aérea Nacional*, 1998–99

Unit	Base	Type	Main Task ('Speciality')
21st Helicopter Regiment			
1st (Light) Helicopter Squadron	Negage	SA 316B, AS.565 Panther, SA 365 Dauphin	Training, liaison, troop transport and fire support
2nd Helicopter Squadron	Negage	Mi-8MT, MI-8MTV-1, Mi-17MTV-3	Assault and troop transport
3rd (Bomber) Helicopter Squadron	Negage	Mi-24, Mi-25	Attack
23rd Air Transport Regiment			
5th Air Transport Squadron	Luanda	An-2, Do.27, Do.28, F.27, CASA C.212	Light transport
6th Air Transport Squadron	Luanda	L-100-20/30, An-12, An-26	Medium transport
7th Air Transport Squadron (also VIP Squadron)	Luanda	Gulfstream III, Falcon 20E, Tu-134A, Boeing 707, Boeing 727, Il-76	VIP and heavy transport
26th Fighter Bomber Regiment			
11th Fighter Squadron, Group 1	Cabinda	MiG-21bis	Fighter-bombers
11th Fighter Squadron, Group 2	Cabinda	MiG-21bis	Fighter-bombers
13th Fighter Squadron	Lubango	MiG-23ML	Fighter-bombers and interceptors
15th Fighter Squadron	Catumbela	Su-22M-4K	Fighter-bombers
16th Fighter Squadron	Catumbela	Su-25	Fighter-bombers
Reconnaissance Squadron	Luanda	PC-7, PC-9, EMB.312	COIN light strikers and reconnaissance

former Soviet military.* In reaction, Luanda placed sizeable orders for additional weapons from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as from Russia, and contracted Western and South African PMCs to help the FANA with the recruitment of experienced foreign pilots and ground personnel. So it happened that between 1998 and 2001, Angola acquired not only 25 additional combat aircraft, but also 205 T-72 MBTs and 38 different artillery pieces, The FANA aircraft were partially operated by Angolan, but also by a sizeable group of Belarusian, Ethiopian, South African, Ukrainian, and even several US pilots and technicians. Furthermore, the Angolan Air Force was completely reorganized during this period, receiving a much leaner structure, with units specialized in specific tasks, as illustrated in Table 2.

Later during the Second Congo War, the NDF purchased at least two Chinese-made Y-12 light transports (serials NAF-97-600 and NAF-97-639) which saw extensive operations in support of Namibian troops in the DRC. *Photo Alan Lebeda*

NDF: Namibia

The decision of the Namibian government to deploy its troops to the DRC was strongly influenced by Angolan and Zimbabwean pressure, but also linked to business interests of members of the Namibian administration. It proved, publicly, very controversial and faced not a few protests.

As of 1998, the largely British-trained Namibian Defence Force (NDF) had only around 8,000 officers and other ranks; the contingent it deployed to the DRC was variously reported as between 1,600 and 2,000 troops, including the 5th Infantry Battalion (equipped with Casspir MRAPs purchased from South Africa and five BRDM-2 armoured cars from surplus Angolan stocks), reinforced by at least one artillery battery. Namibian troops were well-trained professionals, primarily former members of SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization), but also officers and other ranks who had served with the South African-controlled security forces of the former South West Africa in the 1980s and were specialists in counterinsurgency warfare (COIN).

The similarly small air wing of the Namibian Defence Force (NDF/AW) maintained only two squadrons in 1998. The fixed-wing unit flew light aircraft like Cessna O-2As and a single Cessna Caravan II, two Chinese-made Y-12 light transports and one Dassault Falcon 900 VIP-transport. The rotary-wing unit was initially equipped with two Mi-8Ts and two Indian-built Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL) SA 316B Chetaks (a licensed copy of the SA 316B Alouette III), but was soon reinforced by the addition of more helicopters. While Namibian

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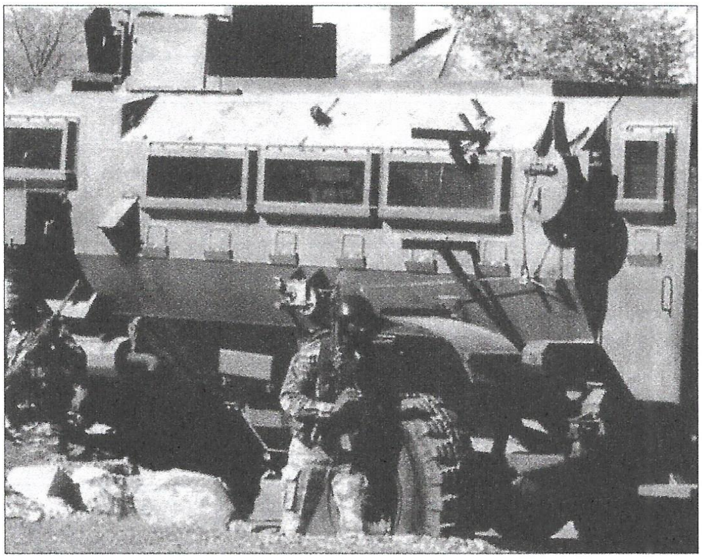
* The mentioned arms deliveries to UNITA as of 1998 included four T-64 tanks, 50 BMP-1 and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), South African-made SAMil-100 MRAPs, a battery of Russian-made BM-22 Uragan MRLs, SPG-9 73mm anti-tank guns and a number of ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft guns. While acquiring such an arsenal, UNITA had to realize it lacked fuel and lubricants, as its mechanized forces were smashed by the FAA in battles near Cuito and Huambo in the latter part of 1999 because they ran out of diesel. These defeats resulted in the ultimate demise of UNITA, following the capture of its HQs at Jamba in 1999.



The NDF ground forces were excellently trained and well equipped. As of 1998, several infantry units used Casspir and Wolf Turbo MRAPs of South African origin for transportation. This photograph shows two Namibian soldiers and a Casspir during an exercise in the mid-1990s. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

One of two HAL Chetaks – Indian-made SA 316B Alouette III helicopters – seen in hastily applied camouflage pattern used during the Second Congo War (but already wearing the title Namibian Air Force, applied in more recent times). *Photo via Chuck Canyon*

Aerial view of the military compound at Luanda IAP, showing a number of transport aircraft and helicopters of the Angolan Air Force. This was not only the main hub for supply operations in support of the Angolan army units deployed in the DRC, but also in support of the Namibian Defence Force. *Photo Greg Swart*

pilots and ground personnel dominated, a few NDF/AW pilots were South Africans who had been granted Namibian citizenship.

The HQ and main logistic base. for NDF operations into the DRC was situated in Grootfontein, just south of the Angolan border. Lacking heavier transport aircraft, the Namibians depended heavily on Angolan help for their deployment and logistics in the DRC.

ZDF: Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe was neither an entirely new player to the big game that unfolded in the DRC in 1998, nor new to the business of external military interventions in Africa. Its military saw extensive deployment during the war in Mozambique in the 1980s. The government of President Robert Mugabe had been a close ally of the AFDL since late 1996, but its decision to intervene on Kabila's side was also related to economic interests for the ruling elite in Harare (primarily related to blocking South Africa's economic and political ascent on the continent), and Mugabe's ambitions to present himself as an African statesman. With the economy at home in tatters, and facing political unrest, the Zimbabwean president could ill afford a dangerous venture in a war that his forces could clearly not win, and that was not economically sustainable. However, the rewards he anticipated outweighed anything he'd been exposed to before, and thus he pushed his military into a conflict that made little sense to most of his people. On 4 September 1998, he signed a deal with Kabila, providing for the deployment of a Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) contingent in Congo. Originally subject to the withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan troops from the DRC, the treaty also envisaged that the Zimbabwean Defence Industries (ZDI) would provide arms, ammunition and equipment in return for the Zimbabwean mining company Ridgepointe taking over the management of Gecamines, the largest state-owned Congolese parastatal cobalt and copper mining company, and receiving a 37.5 per cent share of it. Several additional agreements followed, relating to electric power, civil aviation and agriculture. In essence, Kabila was thus selling mining and trading monopolies to the Zimbabwean government in exchange for military aid. While Zimbabwe thought itself in a position to siphon off sizeable sums of money and raw resources from the DRC's most lucrative mining operations, in reality the Zimbabweans were forced to concede that most of Gecamines' facilities were in almost total disrepair and in need of massive investment in order to become profitable, which neither the Congolese nor Zimbabwean traders could afford due of the collapse of the Congolese banking system. Eventually, no matter how much war matériel the ZDI furnished the FAC with, ultimately, Kinshasa came away without paying for even half of the deliveries. Therefore, benefits for Harare from this involvement would remain minimal.

Reaching back to rich traditions from the Rhodesian times, the Zimbabwean military insisted on high-quality training and maintained close ties with the United Kingdom, Pakistan and China throughout the 1980s. British training teams helped with the integration of the armed forces, the establishment of Zimbabwe's Command and Staff College and logistical and administrative systems, while the Pakistanis trained the air force. From 1998 the ZDF included around 35,000 officers and other ranks of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), organized into five brigades and 23 battalions, the Presidential Guard Brigade and a miscellany of smaller specialized units, as illustrated in Table 3 overleaf. The Zimbabwean military contribution to the

Table 3: Major Units of Zimbabwe National Army, August 1998

Unit	HQ/Base	Remarks
Special Forces		
Presidential Guard	Dzivarasekwa Barracks, Harare	Consisting of three battalions (one battalion at State House, Harare)
Commando Regiment	Cranborne Barracks, Harare	Former Rhodesian Light Infantry, also reported as 1 Commando
Parachute Regiment	Inkomo Barracks, Harare	Also known as Parachute Group
Special Air Service	Kabrit Barracks, Harare	Including at least three squadrons and the Special Boat Squadron with five troops (based at Nyami-nyami)
Independent Armoured Reconnaissance Squadron	Inkomo Barracks, Harare	
2nd Mechanized Regiment		Established during the Second Congo War
Zimbabwe Mounted Infantry	Guinea Fowl, Gweru	Ranger-type, battalion-sized unit; former Grey's Scouts
Brigade-sized Formations		
1 Brigade	Brady Barracks, Bulawayo	Including 1.1 Infantry Battalion (at Mbalabala, Bulawayo), 1.2 Infantry Battalion (Induna, Bulawayo) and 1.3 Battalion (at Plumtree)
2 Brigade	Old Cranborne Barracks, Harare	Including 2.1, 2.2. and 2.3 Infantry Battalions based at Magunje and Mudzi
3 Brigade	Chikanga Barracks, Mutare	Including 3.1, 3.2 (Tsanzaguru Barracks, Rusape), and 3.3 (Chagadzi Barracks) Infantry Battalions
4 Brigade	Masvingo	Including 4.1, 4.2 (Gutu) and 4.3 Infantry Battalions
5 Brigade	Battlefields Barracks, Kadoma	Including 5.1 Infantry Battalion (at Dadaya, Zvishavane), 5.2 and 5.3 Infantry Battalions
Mechanized Brigade	Inkomo Barracks, Harare	Including the tank regiment and mechanized regiment
Artillery Brigade		Including two field artillery regiments and one air defence regiment

Table 4: Air Force of Zimbabwe, 1998

Unit	Base	Type	Main Task (Speciality)
1st Squadron (call-sign: Panzer)	Gweru	6 Hunter FGA.Mk.9 1 Hunter T.Mk.81	Five Hunter FGA.Mk.9s were purchased from Kenya in the 1980s, as was the sole T.Mk.81
2nd Squadron (call-sign: Cobra) & Jet Flight Training School	Gweru	11 Hawk Mk.60[2]	Ten aircraft operational (out of 13 purchased)
3rd Squadron (call-sign: Falcon)	Harare-Manyame	11 C.212-200 5 BN-2A	All operational (one C.212 crashed at Harare in 1997)
4th Squadron (call-sign: Hornet)	Gweru	15 FTB.337G Lynx	Most were operational; served as advanced trainers and light strikers
5th Squadron (call-sign: Arrow)	Gweru	11 F-7IN/IIN	Six–seven interceptors operational out of the original 12 that were purchased in the late 1980s
6th Squadron (call-sign: Tiger)	Gweru	8 SF.260M, 12 SF.260C/W 6 SF.260TP/F	Some 27 available but not all operational; served primarily for basic and advanced flight training
7th Squadron (call-sign: Spider)	Harare-Manyame	20-25 SA.316B	Around 20 operational helicopters, including 19 ex-Portuguese Air Force aircraft
8th Squadron (call-sign: Scorpion)	Harare-Manyame	8 AB.412SP	At least six operational; reinforced by six Mi-35s in September-October 1998

Second Congo War initially involved 11,000 – later increased to 16,000 – professional troops, probably the best and toughest soldiers of the entire conflict. This contingent included much of the ZDF's Special Air Service (SAS), the commando and parachute regiments, numerous companies from different infantry battalions, at least two artillery regiments, a squadron of engineers as well as a squadron from the Independent Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment equipped with 12 Brazilian-made EE-9 Cascavel armoured cars, and support staff. Later on, a mechanized battalion established specifically for combat in the DRC, and combat engineers would follow. Most importantly, all units in the ZDF, including the Air Force of Zimbabwe (AFZ), underwent combined arms operations training, having inherited a well-developed counterinsurgency doctrine of operations from the former Rhodesian army.

The NDF ground forces were excellently trained and well equipped. As of 1998, several infantry units used Casspir and Wolf Turbo MRAPs of South African origin for transportation. This photograph shows two Namibian soldiers and a Casspir during an exercise in the mid-1990s. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

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pilots and ground personnel dominated, a few NDF/AW pilots were South Africans who had been granted Namibian citizenship.

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Zimbabwe was neither an entirely new player to the big game that unfolded in the DRC in 1998, nor new to the business of external military interventions in Africa. Its military saw extensive deployment during the war in Mozambique in the 1980s. The government of President Robert Mugabe had been a close ally of the AFDL since late 1996, but its decision to intervene on Kabila's side was also related to economic interests for the ruling elite in Harare (primarily related to blocking South Africa's economic and political ascent on the continent), and Mugabe's ambitions to present himself as an African statesman. With the economy at home in tatters, and facing political unrest, the Zimbabwean president could ill afford a dangerous venture in a war that his forces could clearly not win, and that was not economically sustainable. However, the rewards he anticipated outweighed anything he'd been exposed to before, and thus he pushed his military into a conflict that made little sense to most of his people. On 4 September 1998, he signed a deal with Kabila, providing for the deployment of a Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) contingent in Congo. Originally subject to the withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan troops from the DRC, the treaty also envisaged that the Zimbabwean Defence Industries (ZDI) would provide arms, ammunition and equipment in return for the Zimbabwean mining company Ridgepointe taking over the management of Gecamines, the largest state-owned Congolese parastatal cobalt and copper mining company, and receiving a 37.5 per cent share of it. Several additional agreements followed, relating to electric power, civil aviation and agriculture. In essence, Kabila was thus selling mining and trading monopolies to the Zimbabwean government in exchange for military aid. While Zimbabwe thought itself in a position to siphon off sizeable sums of money and raw resources from the DRC's most lucrative mining operations, in reality the Zimbabweans were forced to concede that most of Gecamines' facilities were in almost total disrepair and in need of massive investment in order to become profitable, which neither the Congolese nor Zimbabwean traders could afford due of the collapse of the Congolese banking system. Eventually, no matter how much war matériel the ZDI furnished the FAC with, ultimately, Kinshasa came away without paying for even half of the deliveries. Therefore, benefits for Harare from this involvement would remain minimal.

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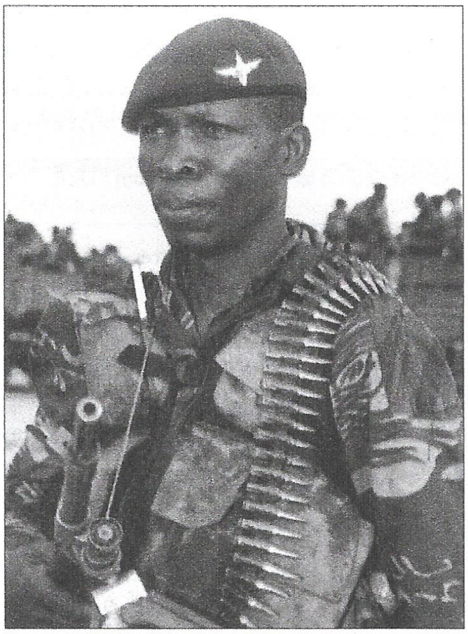
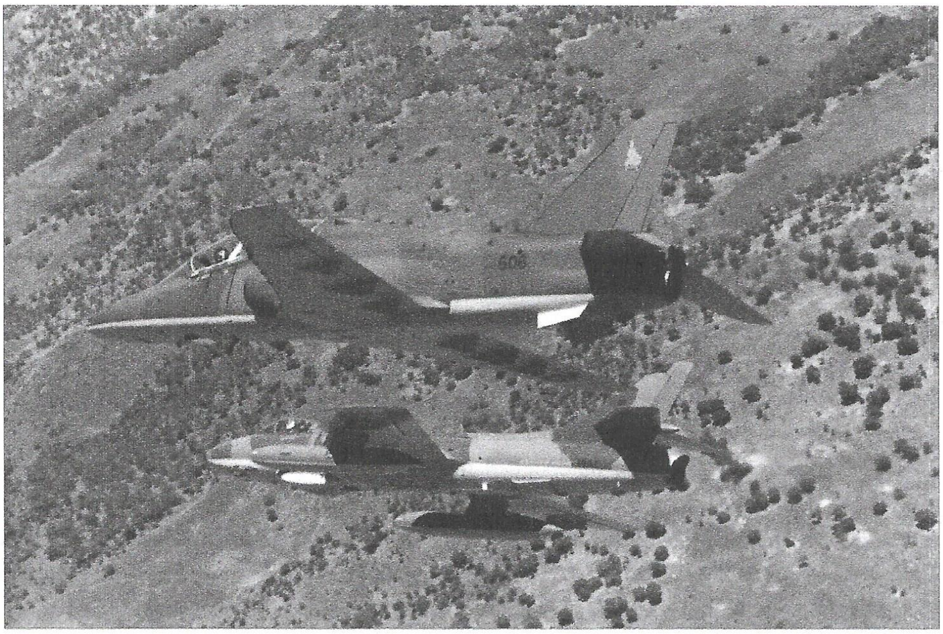


A machine-gunner of the Inkomo Barracks-based Parachute Regiment ZNA. These crack troops proved the toughest, most stubborn – but also most patient – soldiers of the entire war and their involvement proved crucial to the survival of the government in Kinshasa. *Photo via Tom Cooper*



As of mid-1998 the service life of the premier Zimbabwean fighter-bomber, the Hawker Hunter (background) was nearing its end. Therefore none was deployed to the DRC. Instead, the AFZ sent its BAe Hawk Mk 60s (foreground), and these more than proved their mettle in combat. Indeed, they were probably the crucial weapons' system of the conflict. *Photo Pit Weinert Collection*

While their determination and performance in combat were much underestimated (if not outright ignored and often purposely misreported) by nearly all observers, the ZDF soldiers proved to be well trained, well equipped, well led and courageous, not to mention well accepted by the Congolese population as they were rarely involved in acts of misconduct against civilians.

In August 1998, the AFZ was not in a perfect state to fight a war. At the time it was flying a miscellany of relatively old aircraft and helicopters and was experiencing problems with spares acquisitions due to a lack of funding and growing international pressure on Mugabe's administration. Nevertheless, its commander – Air Marshal Perence Shiri (with air vice marshals Ian M. Harvey and Henry Muchena as chiefs of staff operations) – was in charge of arguably the finest and most competent military flying service in Sub-Saharan Africa barring South Africa. Staffed with well-trained, experienced, disciplined and courageous personnel, the AFZ took pride in its excellent flying safety record and quality operations. Like the rest of the ZDF, the AFZ was experienced at surviving against all odds, including periods characterized by a lack of fuel and spares and lengthy combat deployments in Mozambique during the 1980s. At a time when most other African militaries were in a state of disarray, with much of their equipment unserviceable, the Zimbabweans proved an exception to the rule, having an impressive operational record. As of mid-1998, the AFZ was organized as shown in Table 4 on the previous page.

ALiR: ex-FAR and Interhamwe

The Army for the Liberation of Rwanda (ALiR) was the military wing of the Party for the Liberation of Rwanda (PALiR). It was established by former officials of the Rwandan government and military leaders of the Interhamwe and other Hutu militias responsible for the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, during their exile in Zaire/DRC between 1995–97. The ALiR was still in the process of being established during the First Congo War and experienced a series of sharp defeats and suffered extensive losses. Not only was it widely scattered but its leadership fled abroad. However, the morale of its surviving members remained high. They recovered rapidly, continued the recruitment of new fighters and launched a new insurgency against the Tutsis and Rwandans in the Kivus, in late May 1997. Large-scale public massacres of Rwandan Hutu refugees, arbitrary arrests, torture and summary executions of political and ethnic opponents, looting, raping and ill treatment of Congolese civilians by the Rwandans generated a situation in the Kivus where thousands of people – primarily the Hunde, Nyanga and Tembo ethnic groups – began joining the local Mayi-Mayi militias, or at least sympathized with and supported the ALiR.

Initially the ALiR, led by Paul Rwarakabije, operated in the forests of the Walikale and Masisi regions, forcing the Rwandans to deploy a brigade of three battalions in reaction. However, after repeatedly failing to infiltrate northwestern Rwanda in 1997/98, the core of between 10,000 and 15,000 ALiR fighters were eventually forced to entrench themselves in North Kivu. After establishing their HQ in Masisi, they made contact with Kabila, who began providing them with airdrops of weapons and ammunition. By 2000, the ALiR had not only survived around 30 Rwandan offensives, but had expanded its organization, establishing two divisions: the first in North Kivu and the second in South Kivu. Each of these divisions consisted of three brigades of about 2,000 troops each.

The ALiR exhibited a high degree of professional military organization, and was arranged into permanent platoons, companies, battalions, brigades, and, later on, divisions. By 1999, it operated three brigades in North Kivu: the Limpopo Brigade on the Lukweti–Mutongo axis (CO Colonel Mwalimu), the Lilongwe Brigade in the Katoyi area and the Niamey Brigade in the Rutshuru area. Each consisted of three battalions that usually operated independently. A fourth brigade was based in South Kivu. Although having almost no vehicles and continually suffering shortages of ammunition, food,

Table 5: Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, January 2003

Unit	Area of Operations	Remarks
1st Division	North Kivu	Two brigades from ex-ALiR 1st Division and two brigades from ex-ALiR 2nd Division, each with 2,000 troops
2nd Division	South Kivu	One brigade from ex-ALiR 2nd Division and up to five brigades from FDLR, total strength up to 14,000 fighters

medicines and other equipment – indeed practically living off the jungle and often being forced to attack the local population and loot – members of these units maintained a formal rank structure, and were well equipped with light arms and modern communication systems. Except for food and ammunition, a major problem for the ALiR was the lack of heavy weapons. The number of these was so small that only two 60mm mortars could be assigned to each battalion, and only two 12.7mm heavy machine guns to each brigade. However, there were enough AK-47s for all the troops, and each platoon was equipped with five RPG-7s and up to two light machine guns.

The ALiR eventually succumbed to political developments after Laurent Kabila's death in early 2001. Much of its 1st Division ALiR was destroyed while attempting to infiltrate Rwanda in May/June 2001 and what was then left of the organization was subsequently integrated into the CCR/FDLR.

CCR/FDLR: new Rwandan Hutu militants

After the Rwandan invasion of the DRC in August 1998, another group of ex-FAR soldiers and political refugee living in Congo-Brazzaville and Kenya established contact with Kabila with the intention of establishing a new armed force that would prevent a renewal of the Rwandan hunt for Hutu refugees now scattered across the Congo and of re-launching the fight against the RPF in Kigali. A deal was struck, according to which Kabila would provide armament, ammunition and logistic support while Rwandan Hutus would recruit around 10,000 fighters – hardly any of whom were involved in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide – from refugee camps in Tanzania, Zambia, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon and the Central African Republic. This new organization, which began gathering in the DRC during November/December 1998, was often wrongly designated ALiR II – apparently on Rwandan insistence. In fact, it soon developed into a politico-military organization named the Resistance Coordination Committee (CCR) that refused to cooperate with the ALiR because of its genocidal reputation.

The CCR became an organized, well-trained force under the command of ex-FAR General Augustin Bizimungu, consisting of permanent platoons, companies, battalions and brigades. During 1998–2000 it grew to around 14,800 fighters and was practically integrated into the FAC. Its major units were deployed as follows: 11th Brigade in Kamina, Horizon Brigade in Lubumbashi, 12th Brigade in Mbuji-Mayi and two battalions in the Equateur Province (one at Mbandaka and the other in the Ikela area).

By May 2000, the CCR had evolved into the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (*Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda*, FDLR), led by Paul Rwarakabije (the military wing was under the command of Major-General Sylvestre Mudacamura, former XO of the FAR Presidential Guard in Rwanda), and its leaders formally condemned the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.

Through 2001/02 the FDLR was expanded to two divisions (the first with the Apollo, Albatross and Stella brigades, the second with the Horizon, Sun and Star brigades), and two incomplete units (Kamba and Kamina brigades). After the new DRC president, Joseph Kabila, made the decision to intensify the anti-Rwandan insurgency, large parts of the FDLR were infiltrated into South Kivu, where they reorganized again, integrating with the former ALiR. As of January 2003 the FDLR was organized as illustrated in Table 5.

Although losing its main supporter – the Congolese government – at the end of the Second Congo War in 2003, the FDLR refused to be disarmed and returned to Rwanda, continuing its fight against the government in Kigali long after the official end of the conflict. It was largely destroyed in a series of joint Rwandan–Congolese offensives during 2008–10.

FDD: Burundian Hutus

Some of the roughly 100,000 Hutu refugees who fled to Zaire during the civil war in Burundi, 1993–96, established the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (*Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie*, FDD), an insurgent group originally led, in 1994, by Léonard Nyangoma, but subsequently under the control of Pierre Nkurunziza and Jean-Bosco Ndayikengurukiye. The FDD closely cooperated with the FAZ and ALiR during the First Congo War. Although forced to withdraw into the Katanga Province in the face of the Rwandan advance, it remained intact, returned to South Kivu and subsequently began cooperating with various Mayi-Mayi militias. By August 1998, the FDD had established links with Kabila's government which permitted it to control a swath of territory in South Kivu and Katanga, three or four times larger than Burundi, to exploit local minerals – a decision that turned not a few insurgent commanders into millionaires.

By August 1998, the FDD maintained a force of around 4,000 fighters, of which 1,000 were active in the Moba area, 2,000 along Lake Tanganiyka and 1,000 in the Lubumbashi area, where it had its main headquarters. Following continuous power and ethnic struggles in Burundi, the FDD was reinforced with recruits from camps in Tanzania, who were trained in the Congo and may have reached a peak strength of around 16,000 fighters by mid-2000. From around this time, the FDD entered into closer cooperation with the government in Kinshasa. As a result, it began launching attacks into the northern Burundian province of Bubanza. FDD fighters were equipped with the usual mix of AK-47 assault rifles, PKS and PKM machine guns, and a sizeable number of heavy 12.7mm and 14.5mm machine guns, RPG-7s, and 60mm and 80mm mortars.

Mayi-Mayi militias

The community-based militia groups, formed to defend their local territory against any other armed groups, generally known as the Mayi-Mayi, became a very important factor during the Second Congo War. Initially, Mayi-Mayi referred to a predominantly Hunde ethnic militia that was poorly armed (some started their insurgencies using bows and spears). Over time, the name Mayi-Mayi became synonymous for all forms of armed opposition to the Tutsi politico-military order in the eastern DRC. Most Mayi-Mayi groups were run by local warlords, traditional tribal elders and village heads, and

Chad was one of most unusual, and least-expected parties to get involved into the Second Congo War. The deployment of its troops was primarily a result of relations between Laurent Kabila and long-time Libyan strongman, Muammar Gaddafi. The brigade-sized Chadian contingent included a reconnaissance regiment, equipped with AML-90 armoured reconnaissance cars of French origin (seen here), while the infantry was mounted on dozens of Toyota Land Cruiser 4WDs. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

usually consisted of young men who had fled into the jungle because of the reign of terror imposed on their villages by the Rwandans. Most groups formed alliances with the reorganized ALiR and the FDD and began cooperating with the government in Kinshasa.

By August 1998, a number of Mayi-Mayi groups were organized into a division – named the *Bunyakiri Groupement* – led by FAC General Padiri, while a lesser number joined a similar formation established by the PCD. Both these units were provided with arms, ammunition, equipment and money by Kabila's government, including light infantry weapons and 122mm MRLs. When Kabila began encouraging military coordination between the regular military, the FDD and Mayi-Mayi, several larger groups were integrated into the Congolese army. Indeed, Sylvestre Lwetcha – former Simba insurgent and long-time Mayi-Mayi leader who lacked any kind of formal education – was appointed the FAC deputy chief of staff in September 1999, while several other commanders – like Lwengamia Dunia, Padiri and Shabani Skatende – reached high command positions.

Other pro-Kabila parties

Except for Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, Libya played a very important and active role in supporting Kabila's government in Kinshasa. Libya did not deploy any of its own troops in the war, but its air force's transport aircraft were involved in hauling equipment and troops of other contingents – primarily those from Chad – as well as arms, ammunition and supplies purchased in Eastern Europe. The deployment of troops of the Chadian National Armed Forces (*Armée Nationale du Tchad*, ANT) was tied to Libyan support for Kabila's government. As far as is known, the ANT deployment totalled a 2,227-strong motorized brigade, supported by a company of AML-90 armoured cars and equipped with several hundred Toyota 4WDs, which operated outside the overall SADC command. Chadian troops were combat-experienced veterans of wars against Libya in the 1980s, and were renowned for their use of *rezzou* – high-speed raids, usually involving outflanking the enemy and aiming for his HQ or centre of political power. For this purpose, their Toyotas were heavily adapted to become so-called 'technicals', through the installation of a heavy machine gun, or ZPU-1 or ZPU-4 flak, or recoilless 106mm rifle, or Chinese-made 106mm/122mm multiple-rocket launchers, on the rear cargo platform. Other Toyotas carried teams equipped with French-made Milan anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs). The Chadian contingent began arriving in Kinshasa on 27 August 1998 and was primarily deployed in the northern Equateur Province, where it fought against Ugandan units and MLC insurgents.

As mentioned above, North Korea deployed around 300 military advisers to support the DRC government, not least due to interest in the Shunkolobwe uranium mines in Katanga Province – even though these were reportedly in a state of complete disrepair.* Furthermore, North Korea helped the Congolese construct an ammunition production facility, the Afrides Works, at Camp Mura in Likas, where not only small-arms ammunition, but also mortars, mines and 250kg and 500kg aviation bombs were manufactured. However, some of these weapons were of poor manufacturing quality, resulting in a number of catastrophic incidents. The worst of these occurred on 14 April 2000 when a serious fire started inside a warehouse at N'Djili IAP and spread to a cargo of ammunition, causing a series of explosions that killed 109 people, injured 216, and destroyed five aircraft (including the FAC Caravelle 9Q-CZZ, a government of Congo B707 9Q-CGC, two Canadair CL-44 transports, 3C-ZPO and TN-235, and a Blue Lines An-28 9Q-CZL).

Congolese anti-Kabila insurgent groups

A number of different armed insurgent groups appeared inside the DRC during the late 1990s and early 2000s, most playing either a minor or overtly irrelevant role in the general flow of the war, and unrelated to the Rwandan-led invasion. Classic examples of such groups were the Convention of National Reformers (CNR), the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (*Union pour la Démocratie et le Progress Social*, UPDS) and the Christian Social-Democratic Party (*Parti Démocrate-Social Chrétien*, PDSC). The CNR was led by Jacques Malanda who, with Joseph Kabila, led the final AFDL advance on Kinshasa in April/May 1997. Malanda fell out of favour with Laurent Kabila and then established an armed wing of radical opposition aimed at toppling the government and establishing what he called "a law-abiding state". Next to nothing is known about the military

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* The state of the Sunkolobwe uranium mines was obviously of much concern to Washington and Paris as well, and the most likely reason for numerous nocturnal flights by unidentified aircraft, as well as some insertions of special troops, reported on a number of occasions during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Three LRA insurgents, as seen late in the 1990s. After suffering extensive losses by employing 'human-wave' tactics earlier on, they were largely forced out of Uganda and – like the ADF – began operating out of bases inside northeastern Congo, in turn offering the government in Kampala a pretext for massive troop presence deep within the DRC. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

operations the CNR might have undertaken. The UPDS and the PDSC initially favoured political negotiation to armed rebellion. Over time, some of their activists joined various insurgent groups, even though most of them did not want to be associated with the Rwandans. In 1999, a number of former DSP officers, led by Colonel Jean Imbamba, established a group named the Union of Republican Nationalists for Liberation, supposedly based in Congo-Brazzaville. They claimed to have captured the town of Bolobo, 250km northeast of Kinshasa, in March that year, but were not heard from afterward, and the government in Brazzaville quickly denied their presence.

Ugandan insurgent groups in the Congo

Several Ugandan insurgent groups found secure bases inside the extensive forests of northeastern DRC, but only two of these became actively involved in the Second Congo War. The first was the Allied Democratic Forces/Front (ADF), a group of exiles of different origins, but primarily purist Muslims, led by Ssentamu Kayiira. The ADF not only provided the official Ugandan excuse for the deployment of its troops in the DRC but was actively supported by the Sudanese Secret Service. It operated out of the town of Kasindi until suffering extensive losses in fighting with the Ugandan army in late 1996. Scattered survivors were forced to withdraw into the Ituri forest in 1998/99, before finding themselves on the receiving end of further Ugandan offensives. They eventually dwindled to only four companies, totalling between 200 and 300 fighters, scattered anywhere between Butembo and Mount Virunga. Armed with AK-47s, a few machine guns and mortars, they primarily operated in small groups of ten to 15 men, with very little coordination between them.

Time and again the ADF cooperated with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), originally a small, but eventually notorious Ugandan insurgent group, also forming a loose coalition named the Allied Democratic Movement (ADM). Originally established by the members of the Acholi ethnic group in northern Uganda, frustrated by the loss of power after Museveni's victory over the government of Tito Okello in 1986, the LRA suffered extensive losses due to its early human-wave attacks, forcing its core to withdraw to the northeastern DRC toward the end of the Second Congo War.

The least-known, yet equally important party on the side of Kabila's government early in the war, was the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), which consisted of supporters for the former Ugandan president, Idi Amin Dada. Established in 1995 and led by Amin's former foreign minister, Colonel Juma Oris, the WNBF originally operated out of bases inside Sudan, but was forced to withdraw into the DRC after suffering heavy losses in fighting against the Sudanese People's Liberation Army and the UPDF in March 1997, when Oris was killed.

After the outbreak of the Second Congo War, Laurent Kabila and Amin's son, Taban, reached an agreement for the surviving 500 fighters to be deployed with the FAC. Many of them were captured or killed during the battle of Kindu in September/October that year.

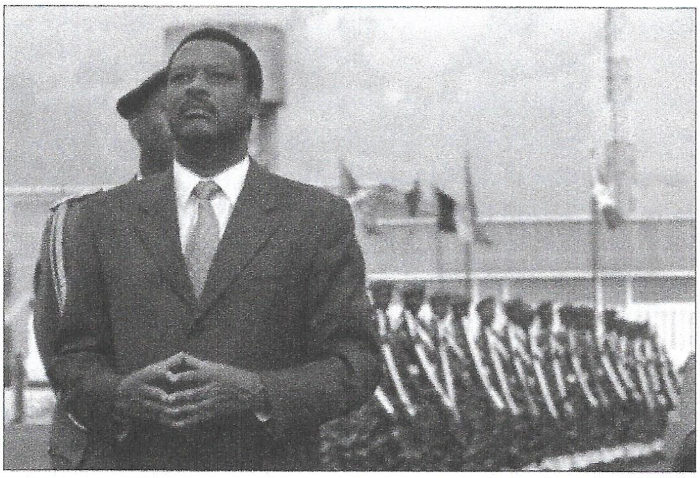
CHAPTER THREE:
MILITARY FORCES OF RWANDA AND ITS ALLIES

The anti-government coalition dominated by Rwanda and Uganda managed to receive the backing of only one other foreign government, namely that of Burundi. However, while organizations fighting in support, or with the support, of Kabila's government included at least three insurgent armies from outside its borders (namely the ALiR, FDD and WNBF), the Rwandans and Ugandans had established and ran a number of domestic armed and political parties that provided them with a Congolese presence. This chapter provides an overview of the regular armies and most important insurgent groups that fought against the government in Kinshasa, 1998–2003.

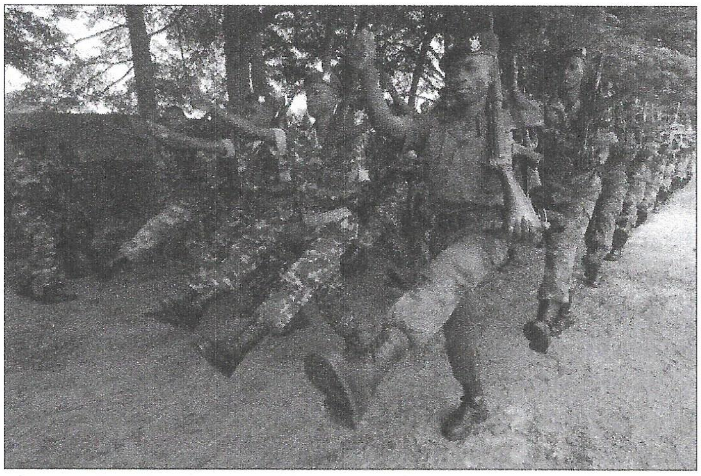
FAB: Burundi

A relatively new external source of unrest, that spilled into Congo in the late 1990s, was the densely populated country of Burundi. Almost uninterrupted ethnic conflicts, civil war, widespread corruption, poor education and health conditions, had turned this country – which separated from Rwanda at the request of its ruler Mwami Mwambutsa IV in 1959 – into another battlefield of Hutu–Tutsi conflict. Following an endless cycle of coups, counter-coups, civil unrest, oppression and mass killings, the first democratic elections were held in June 1993. In October, the newly elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated by Tutsi extremists, sparking a new wave of ethnic violence, the primary target of which became the Tutsi minority. The parliament subsequently elected Ntaryamira to the office of president. He was killed, along with the president of Rwanda, in April 1994, and the situation rapidly deteriorated as the killings escalated. Once the Hutu peasants began rising up and massacring Tutsis, the Tutsi-dominated army established itself in

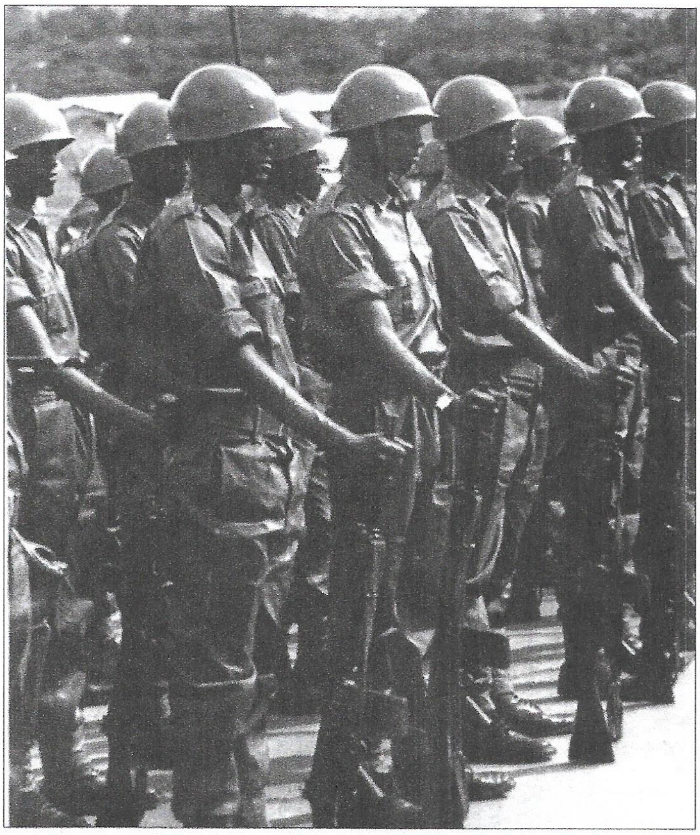
While it is certain that the FAB deployed up to 6,000 troops inside the eastern DRC in late 1998/early 1999, it remains unknown whether any of its AML-60s and AML-90 armoured cars saw combat service in the conflict. *Photo Albert Grandolini collection*



A former major in the Burundian army, Pierre Buyoya, established himself in power through a coup d'état in July 1996. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



Burundi is one of the poorest nations in the world, and the civil war that ravaged much of the country from 1994 did not improve the situation. Its poor economy is apparent in this outfit of FAB troops, who are not only wearing entirely different uniforms, but are also armed with assault rifles of varying origin. *Photo Eric Scavetta*

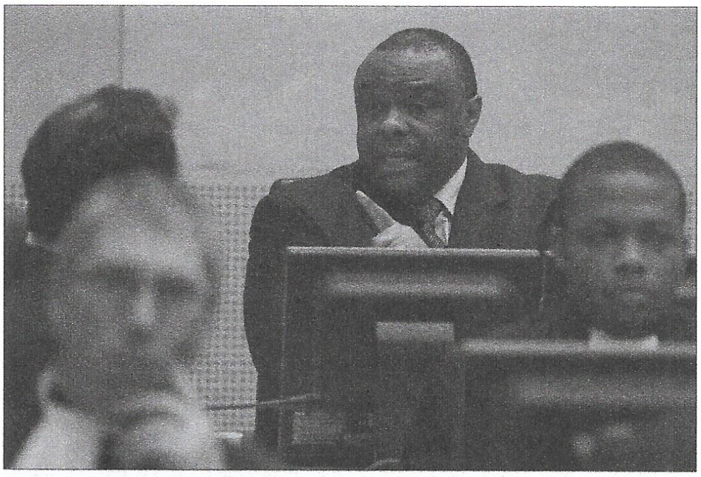


The Tutsi-dominated FAB found it seamless to enter close cooperation with the RPA. Furthermore, because of immense loot from the DRC, its top commanders became eager to get involved in the Second Congo War as well. Their original armament of Belgian and French origin – like FN-FAL assault rifles that can be seen here – was rapidly replaced by Kalashnikovs, RPGs and other arms of East European origin during the late 1990s. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

Following the Rwandan pattern, the FAB entered close cooperation with the US military during the 1990s and staged a number of joint exercises. This was taken during an exercise in 2007, and shows a group of FAB troops and NCOs wearing a mixture of camouflage fatigues typical of this army. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

power and went on to round up thousands of Hutus and kill them. Of course, the influx of hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees into eastern Congo, following the Rwandan Genocide, destabilized the country even more, and the situation did not improve when Major Pierre Buyoya established himself in power in another (his second) coup d'état in July 1996. Because of Buyoya's coup, the country was placed under a regional trade embargo and was too weak to become directly involved in the First Congo War. However, the DRC government never observed this embargo and thus it was used as a passage for Burundi's international trade. Therefore, and not forgetting the already present FDD, Buyoya ordered a discreet deployment of the Burundian Armed Forces (*Forces Armées du Burundi*, FAB) on the Rwandan side when the Second Congo War broke out. Subsequent developments in the country resulted in the decline of its involvement and, by 2001, Burundi was practically a no-show in the Second Congo War.

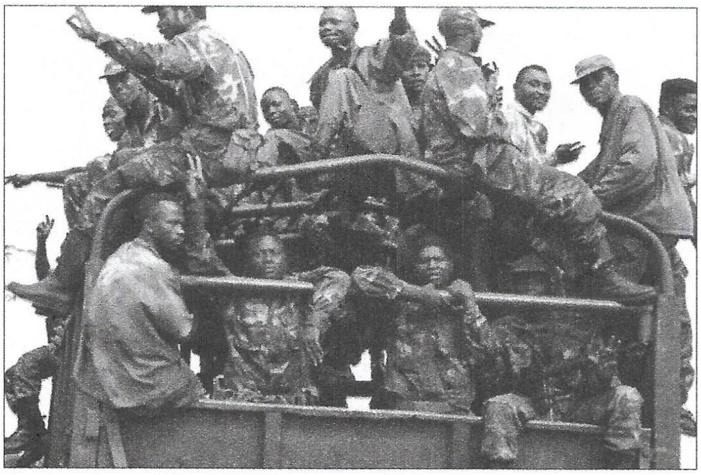
As of 1998, the FAB held only 7,000 men under arms, consisting



Although excelling through his organizational and PR skills, boss of the MLC, Jean-Pierre Bemba, was little more than a warlord who was responsible for widespread atrocities against the civilian population. Nevertheless, through looting and trafficking extensive natural resources under his control, and with Ugandan help, he established one of the most combat-effective rebel/insurgent organizations of the Second Congo War. *Photo International Criminal Court*

Laurent Nkunda was appointed CO 7th Brigade ANC in August 1998 and held this position until the end of the Second Congo War, by which time he had became one of the most notorious warlords in the DRC.

Two MLC fighters, as seen toward the end of the Second Congo War. Primarily trained in Uganda, they proved tough in combat and often managed to overpower larger, better equipped FAC units. *Photo Marco Longari*



A platoon of ANC troops on a requisitioned civilian truck. The mix of uniforms they can be seen wearing here – which includes ex-FAZ, ex-East German and various Western field caps, shirts, field trousers, fatigues and boots – is typical for an unconventional military organization, trying hard to present itself as the armed force in control of much of the DRC. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

mainly of conscripts recruited for six months, equipped with a few AML-60s and AML-90s, around 20 BTR-40s, Milan ATGMs and ZPU-1 anti-aircraft machine guns. The small air wing, equipped with three SIAI-Marchetti SF.260Ws and three SF.260Cs and cannon-armed Aéorspatiale SA 316B Alouette IIIs and SA 342 Gazelles, was seldom seen in action.

Initially, the FAB deployed around 1,000 troops, primarily in the Kalemie area, but by the late 1998, their number had been increased to around 5,000. The Burundian soldiers were reasonably well trained and considered adequate at small-unit level, but lacked training in COIN warfare, and modern means of communication. The latter was the reason for their suffering heavy losses to Zimbabwean air raids during the course of their transit to the DRC. By 2000, only around 2,000 FAB troops were left in the DRC and much of their officers' attention was distracted by renewed power struggles at home.

MLC: Bemba's private army backed by Uganda

Established with Ugandan help in the Orientale Province, the Movement for Liberation of Congo (*Mouvement de Libération Congolais*, MLC) had grown from a motley collection of 154 fighters in December 1998, to a highly effective private army led by millionaire businessman Jean-Pierre Bemba, and totalling around 6,000 disciplined fighters of very different origin, trained at Camp Kasese in Uganda, but also by UPDF troops in Isiro, Kisangani and Bunia. In cooperation with Uganda, the MLC established itself in control of the entire Orientale and much of the Equateur provinces by the end of the Second Congo War. With help from the extensive natural resources under his control, Bemba established close ties to Victor Bout and a number of Russian arms merchants, enabling him to turn the military wing of the MLC (commanded by a person known only as Colonel Amur) into a powerful military player, with its headquarters in Gemena.

The fact that he exercised complete control over the organization proved a significant factor later during the Second Congo War when, with help from Libya, the MLC was boosted in strength to around 9,000 fighters, excellently equipped with the usual assortment of Eastern bloc infantry weapons but also supported by heavy weapons and even several helicopters (including one Mi-8P saloon helicopter and at least one Mi-24 gunship).

While declaring that his army was fighting to end corruption, tribalism and nepotism, Bemba was little more than a warlord in the classic sense.

RCD: Congolese Tutsi (Banyamulenge)

Initially named the AFDL-bis, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie*, RCD) was administered by a number of Congolese from different political backgrounds, from former AFDL members to former supporters of Mobutu's rule. While presented by the Rwandans as the initiators of the mutiny against Kabila, the RCD was actually an instrument of the government in Kigali; its most important leaders were Banyamulenge, ethnic Rwandan Tutsis imported and settled by Belgians in eastern Congo during the early 20th century, and denied Zairian citizenship by Mobutu's government during 1993–96.

Established on 16 August 1998, the RCD was led by Ernesto Wamba Dia Wamba (a long-time opponent of Mobutu), Bizma Karaha (a Tutsi from South Kivu and former minister of foreign affairs under Kabila), Déogratias Bugera (a Tutsi from North Kivu and a former member of the AFDL), Emile Ilunga (the former FNCL activist who distanced himself from Kabila between April and June 1997) and Moise Nyarugabo (a Tutsi from South Kivu and former secretary-general of the AFDL). Its aim was to end the presidency of Laurent Kabila. Within a few months and through integrating some minor opposition groups – such as the Union of Independent Democrats (*Union des Démocrats Indépendents*, UDI), led by Alexis Tambwe and Kengo wa Dondo (former director of Zairian customs under Mobutu), it established cells in the Kivus, the Orientale Province, northern Katanga and even the Equateur Province, but was generally disliked by the local population and never accepted as a new authority.

The RCD established its own armed wing, the National Congolese Army (*Armée National Congolaise*, ANC) in August/September 1998, which initially consisted of defected elements of several major FAC units and groups of disparate people and their followers.

The core of the ANC included the former 10th Commando Brigade FAC, based in Goma, parts of which were reorganized as the 5th Brigade (CO Barnard Biamungu) and the 7th Brigade (CO Laurent Nkunda). The former 11th Brigade FAC became the 1st Kalemie Brigade ANC while several FAC battalions and companies which defected from Kongolo, Kabalo and Nyunzu were reorganized as the Kongolo Brigade. Following the recruitment of additional Congolese and Rwandan nationals, and their training at military bases in Kami, Cyangugu, Gisenyi and Gabiro (in Rwanda), the ANC also established its 11th and 12th brigades (CO David Rugayi), which were subsequently deployed in the Masisi, Walikale and Kitchanga areas.

Despite their apparent enthusiasm for fighting against Kabila early in the war, the RCD actually proved very unreliable in battle. The majority of its soldiers had little loyalty to the rebel cause, and repeated desertions greatly decreased the force that had numbered up to 20,000 fighters in late 1998.

Top command and control functions over the ANC were exercised by RPA officers, even though several of its brigades were under the command of Congolese nationals – whether of Tutsi or other ethnic groups. The RPA was also responsible for training the ANC in intelligence and engineering, as well as providing most of its supplies. The ANC troops proved effective in fighting the FAC, while performing less well in combat with well-trained Angolan, Namibian and Zimbabwean troops.

The RCD was by no means a coherent force and, in March 1999, in light of growing disagreement between Rwanda and Uganda, it split into a pro-Rwandan wing, the so-called RCD-Goma (RCD-G), and a pro-Ugandan wing, the *RCD-Mouvement de Libération* (RCD-ML). Although greatly weakened, the RCD-G managed to bring parts of northern Katanga, the Kasais and Equateur Province under its control, thanks to continuous Rwandan support. Consisting of only around 2,000 fighters, the RCD-ML was severely divided by internal feuds and proved scarcely able to assist Uganda. The organization was taken over by the Uganda-supported Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), an offspring of Mayi-Mayi militias dominated by the Hema ethnic group.

Led by Thomas Lubanga and Bosco Ntaganda, by the end of the Second Congo War, this force had grown to around 15,000 fighters siding with Rwanda, which provided it with light infantry weapons, medium and heavy machine guns, RPG-7s and even several BRDM-2 armoured cars.

RPA: Rwanda

While officially withdrawing from the DRC in September 1997 and then again in July 1998, in reality, Rwanda remained conspicuous by its continued presence in the country. Actually, the officers of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) ignored the borders between Congo and Rwanda, and their continued presence was critical, not only because of the ALiR and Mayi-Mayi insurgencies in the Kivus, but also because of Kigali's interests in exploiting Congolese mineral wealth. Once the decision was taken that the RPA launch a new invasion of the Congo to topple Kabila's government, the Rwandan government officially denied any involvement, explained that the fighting was caused by another uprising and mutiny within the Congolese military.

On a diplomatic level, the Rwandans were more frank with their US allies, as the Americans knew about Kigali's direct involvement in the invasion. Before invading the DRC, Rwandan leaders had asked for a green light from Washington, explaining the Tutsi killings and the ethnic solidarity with the Banyamulenge, as well as Kabila's failure to establish a responsible government. Riding the USA's guilt for the 1994 genocide, Kagame found the Americans unable to challenge his rationale. Actually, Rwandan involvement was more related to economic benefits, relieving demographic pressure and growing an oversized army than any security issues.

Through 1997/98, Kigali continued investing heavily in the further build-up of the RPA. Rwandan authorities remained opaque, with much of its revenue and expenses going unregistered. Most authoritative estimates indicate that at least 50 per cent of the budget during this period – the majority of which was obtained from so-called foreign development aid – was allocated to defence. Correspondingly, the RPA was significantly expanded. In December 1997, the Rwandan cabinet approved the creation of an additional seventh brigade, and a redefinition of brigade boundaries to facilitate combat operations (instead of the earlier organization that mirrored political administrative boundaries, often creating operational difficulties).

New units were established by August 1998, so that this all-volunteer force of around 50,000 officers and other ranks included one armoured reconnaissance battalion, equipped with ten–12 T-55 MBTs and up to 40 BRDM-2 armoured reconnaissance cars (purchased from Romania and elsewhere through the mediation of the Israeli company LR Avionics Technologies), and other specialist

Table 6: Major Units of the Rwanda Patriotic Army, 1998–99

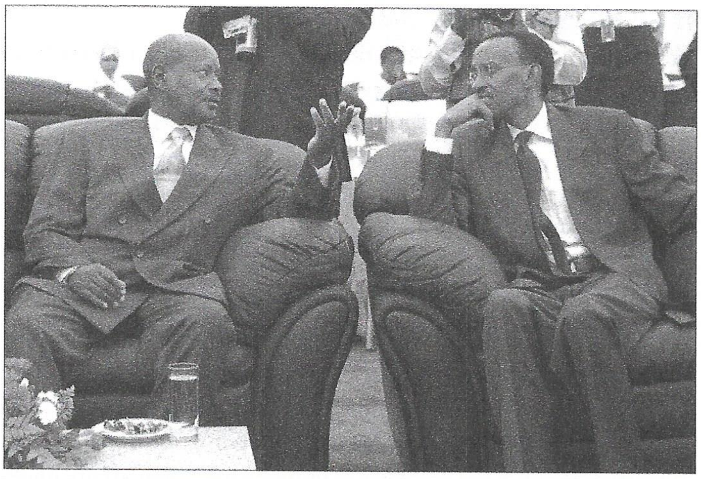
Unit	Base	Area of Responsibility
High Command Unit	Kigali	Directly assigned to the high command
Republican Guard Brigade	Kigali	Kigali City Province
201 Brigade	Kibungo	Kibungo, Umatura and Byumba Prefectures
211 Brigade	Gisenyi	Gisenyi and Ruhengeri Prefectures
301 Brigade	Butare	Butare, Gikongoro and Cyangugu Prefectures
305 Brigade	Gitatama	Gitatama and Kibuye Prefectures
402 Brigade	Kigali	Kigali and Kigali Rurale Prefecture
408 Brigade	Ruhengeri	Estabished 10 January 1999; Ruhengeri Prefecture

troops. Furthermore, each of the seven infantry brigades now included a company equipped either with RG-31 Nyala or Casspir MRAPs, in addition to their usual complement of Toyota 4WDs. The overall composition of major RPA units in 1998/99 is shown in Table 6 above.

Each of these brigades usually had three to five battalions, but additional battalions were often added – or subtracted – depending on combat requirements (while most of the battalions received numerical designations, quite a few were known only by their nicknames). Additional RPA units – including 221 and 501 brigades – were established sometime during 1998/early 1999, partially through the recruitment and re-education of ex-FAR officers and other ranks, and partially through the recruitment of Congolese Tutsis. There is some doubt that this helped change the perception that the new Rwandan army was exclusively Tutsi, as officially maintained by Kigali and its foreign supporters. Roughly 2,000 ex-FAR troops underwent re-education training at Camp Gako between 1994 and 1997. Some of them subsequently assumed high positions in the RPA. For example, Colonel Balthazar Ndengeynika became commander of 305 Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Laurent Munyakazi became commander of the 99th Battalion and Colonel Marcel Gasinzi became deputy chief of staff. They were primarily deployed inside the DRC, often under the guise of allied insurgent groups and – as some sources affirm – with the purpose of acting as cannon fodder.

Professional RPA troops were well trained, well equipped, disciplined and highly motivated, primarily through indoctrination that taught them to regard all ex-FAR and Interhamwe – thus just about any Hutu refugee in the DRC – as savage criminals with whom there could be no compromise. No matter how well disciplined or eager to defeat the Hutus (or any of their allies), Rwandan Tutsi soldiers displayed no mercy for any Congolese civilians alleged to have supported the Hutus or the Kabila government, and were therefore involved in extensive atrocities against the local population. The RPA troops from other ethnic groups were motivated by promises of good pay and the establishment of Rwandan hegemony over the rich (when compared with Rwanda) eastern Congo.

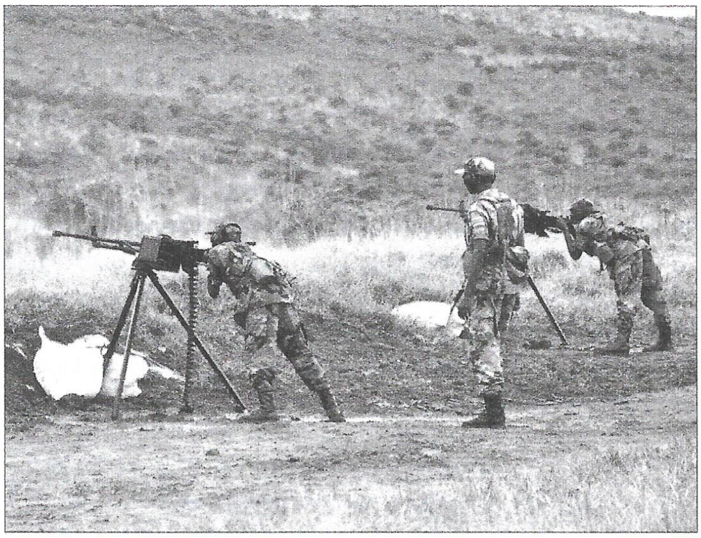
However, no matter how determined and ferocious in combat, the RPA units remained weak in firepower and maintained their



Paul Kagame (right) chats with Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni. Kagame ably exploited not only the US inability to challenge the Rwandan stance against Kabila, but also the economic and political interests of the Clinton administration in the DRC for his own purposes.
Photo Courtesy Umuvugizi

Often outfitted with rather rudimentary equipment, such as rubber-boots, and armed with the usual combination of AK-47s, PKT, PKS/PKM machine guns and RPG-7s, the RPA soldiers nevertheless earned themselves a reputation as fierce fighters.
Photo Mark Lepko Collection

Often described as brilliant, and proving their capabilities and innovative ideas on the battlefield on a number of occasions, the Rwandan People's Army officers – a group of which can be seen here after the war – also made a number of crucial mistakes which eventually cost them a victory in the Second Congo War. Ironically, many of them were undergoing training at Zimbabwean military training facilities only a few days before fighting erupted in 1998.
Photo Courtesy Umuvugizi



Except for Gako, the other major RPA training facility is located in Gabiro. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

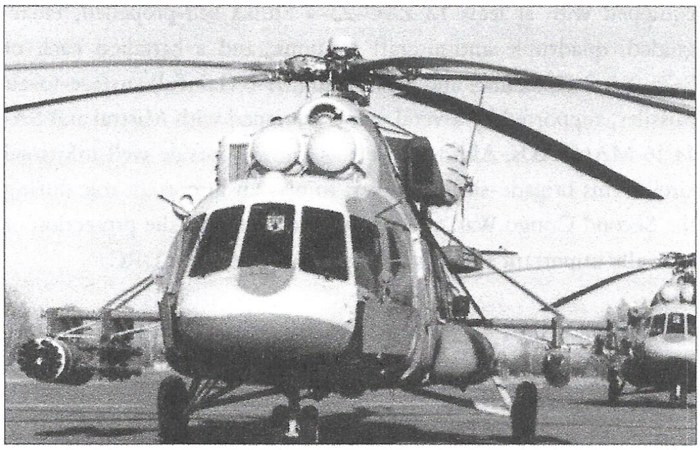
character of a competent guerrilla army for the duration of the Second Congo War. Furthermore, their commanders, supposedly renowned for brilliant military thinking and sound tacticians, made a number of crucial strategic mistakes during this war.

RPA/AW: Rwandan Patriotic Army/Air Wing

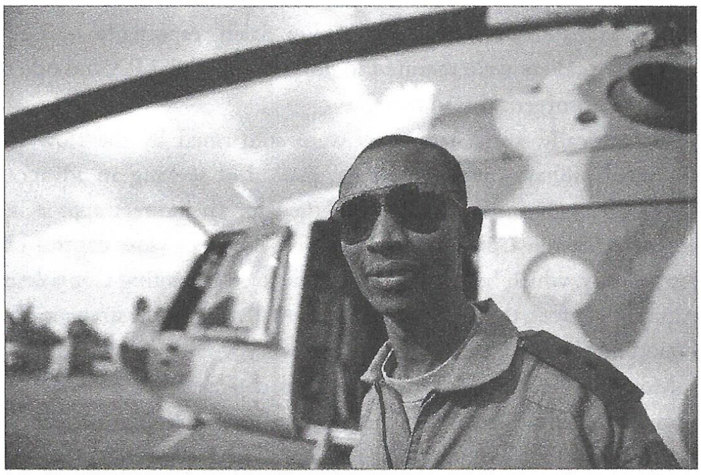
The air wing of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA/AW) underwent a transformation similar to that of the army. For almost 30 years following the country's independence, its predecessor, the *Force Aérienne Rwandaise*, was a small transport and liaison arm, equipped with a few helicopters and light transports of French origin. It swiftly fell apart in 1994, having lost most of its equipment in combat or to defections. While a miscellany of light transports and various helicopters should have survived the Rwandan civil war, only four of these remained operational afterward, including two Aérospatiale SA 342 Gazelles flown by Hutu pilots fleeing to Zaire (where they were taken up by the FAZ and received Zairian registrations 9T-HG3 and 9T-HG5). Although they should have been returned to Rwanda after Kabila came to power, their eventual fate remains unknown.

A new air force was established late in 1995 with help from various PMCs, foremost among which was the Air Defence Consultant Company (ADCC) from Israel. It was initially equipped with only two SA 316B Alouette IIIs left over from the FAR era. In 1996, two Mil Mi-24 helicopter gunships were acquired through the Consolidated Sales Corporation. These spent most of their first year in Rwanda hidden in a hangar in the military cantonment of Kigali IAP – waiting for their pilots to complete ADCC training. When sighted in the air for the first time, in mid-July 1997, they were still flown by a group of Russian, Ukrainian and several English-speaking pilots (apparently US, British or Israeli nationals), also recruited by the Israelis. Kagame hastily explained to the media that they were "urgently required to fight the Interhamwe and ex-FAR rebels".*

The Rwandans continued purchasing combat helicopters and, by 1997, the first two Mi-24s were reinforced with another four, followed by four Mi-171MTV-5 assault helicopters, at least five Mi-8MTV-2 transport helicopters, and two Mi-172 saloon helicopters, most of which were acquired directly from the Kazan Helicopters Factory (via the Russian state-run defence company, Rosoboronexport). The Mi-171s arrived with a shipment of pods for 23mm cannons, AT-14 anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), 68 and 80mm rocket pods, and were flown by the first group of Rwandan pilots to complete their training.†



Pre-delivery photograph of the first two Mi-171s manufactured for Rwanda, showing them armed with (from left to right) B-8B launcher for unguided 80mm rockets, AT-14 ATGM and a 23mm gun-pod. *Photo Kazan Helicopters*



Nearly all the original cadre of the RPA/AW consisted of newly recruited personnel, like Captain Vincent Ngenzi, seen here in front of an Mi-171 helicopter. Most pilots were trained in the Ukraine and Israel, and, unlike their ex-FAR predecessors, were English-speaking. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

Hidden inside the same hangar with the Mi-24s in the military cantonment at Kigali IAP were three additional SA 342 Gazelle helicopters of unknown origin. They were made operational in late 1997 and were initially flown by French-speaking pilots, until enough Rwandans qualified to fly and service them, but nothing is known about their possible involvement in the Second Congo War – which is contrary to the Mi-171s which proved crucially important in supporting the Rwandan army during early COIN operations against the ALiR and Mayi-Mayi between June and September 1997. Eventually, the Mi-24s and their crews were organized into the Combat Squadron, and Mi-171s and other helicopters into the Helicopter Transport Squadron.

Subordinated to the RPA/AW was the Air Defence Regiment, equipped with at least 12 ZSU-23-4 Shilka self-propelled, radar-guided, quadruple anti-aircraft cannons, and a battalion each of S-75 (SA-2 Guideline) and 2K12 Kub (SA-6 Gainful) surface-to-air missiles, supported by several teams equipped with Mistral and SA-14/16 MANPADs. Although little is known outside well-informed circles, this brigade-sized unit was to play an important role during the Second Congo War, when it was deployed for the protection of crucially important airfields and roads in the eastern DRC.

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* Rwanda/Helicopters, by Diana Cahn, VOA, 30 July 1997

† According to a Syrian Military Intelligence officer interviewed on condition of anonymity, in March 2006, some of Mi-8/17s acquired by Rwanda were actually delivered by a company run by top Syrian military officials, from Belarus via Syria to Sierra Leone, and from there to Kigali. According to the same source, this occurred during a period of 'special relations' between the US and Syrian military intelligence apparatus.

UPDF: Ugandan Regular Army (Inc.)

Although facing multiple insurgencies at home, and badly shaken by purges of its top officers following a coup attempt in late 1997, the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) deployed nearly a quarter of its manpower – which totalled around 40,000 – inside the DRC between July and September 1998. The government in Kampala justified this massive effort by citing its security interests. Ugandan president, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, and his half-brother, chief of staff UPDF, Lieutenant-General Salim Saleh, repeatedly stressed that their soldiers were required to pursue the ADF, LRA and other Ugandan insurgents based there.

Theoretically, such statements were confirmed by the flow of Ugandan military operations, then, instead of seeking an advance on Kinshasa, Kampala eventually settled for an indirect approach: empowering the Congolese. In practice, Museveni lost control of his military, which became so deeply involved in looting Congolese natural resources, that related affairs eventually ruined the strategically important alliance with Kigali.

More specifically, the Ugandan troops deployed inside the DRC from early July 1998 (when they officially established a forward base in Ntabi, 15km inside the DRC, during the course of an operation against the ADF), were assigned to the 2nd Division UPDF, commanded by Museveni's nephew, Major-General James Kazini, and headquartered in Mbara, in southwestern Uganda. This powerful formation of around 10,000 troops included the 3rd Tank Battalion (equipped with 30 T-55MBTs), the 17th, 69th, 73rd and 77th infantry battalions (equipped with Buffel and Casspir MRAPs, and Israeli-made SOLTAM 120mm mortars) and an artillery regiment. However, as of August 1998, only minor elements of the 2nd Division were still present in the DRC. Instead, three battalions from other Ugandan divisions were present, including the 7th, 19th and 65th, who did most of the fighting. Similarly, 305 Brigade UPDF was deployed to Kisangani in early September 1998.

Generally, the UPDF troops were reasonably well trained but proved less reliable in combat than the Rwandans, even though they possessed far greater firepower. The problem with the Ugandan military deployed in the DRC was its high-ranking officers. Namely, after Kazini and his troops moved to Kisangani, their performance was characterized rather by extensive looting of the Congolese natural resources and economy and their involvement in organized crime, than by military performance.

Indeed, through 1999 the levels of corruption within the top ranks of the UPDF reached such heights that when Uganda began ordering additional weapons in reaction to the outbreak of the Second Congo War, nearly all its top military pocketed millions from trafficking gold out of the Congo and from bribes paid by foreign companies in exchange for signing contracts for expensive, but often useless armament and equipment. For example, when Uganda ordered 62 T-55s from Rumanian and Bulgarian stocks – via the Israeli PMC Silver Shadow (owned by infamous arms dealer Amos Golan) – these tanks arrived in nearly derelict condition and the UPDF was subsequently forced to pay hundreds of millions to Saracen Uganda (co-owned by Lieutenant-General Salim Saleh) for setting up a special industrial workshop to overhaul the MBTs in question. Similarly, Saleh received a bribe of US$800,000 to agree to the purchase of two Mil Mi-24s from Belarus via the Consolidated Sales Corporation Company, at a much exaggerated price of US$13 million, although neither of these helicopter gunships was overhauled before delivery, as explicitly specified in the contract. Years later, Saleh and most of his closest aides were forced to admit their involvement in a number of such dubious deals, as well as in trafficking gold, timber and various minerals out of the DRC, usually in cooperation with Victor Bout. Most of them resigned in disgrace on 1 December 2003.

Their involvement in such affairs actually provided undeniable evidence that the Ugandan military involvement in the DRC was primarily commercial in character. The Ugandans not only looted the Congolese to stuff their own pockets, but also to finance their deployment in Congo and provide further financial support to the insurgents of the SPLA in Sudan.

With the help of Belarusian, Bulgarian, Israeli and Ethiopian advisers, the small UPDF/AW, commanded by Colonel Joshua Masaba, was constantly expanded between 1996 and 1998 and, although suffering at least one fatal accident during the First Congo War, by August 1998, the number of available Mi-8MTV-2s was increased to seven, mainly through purchases directly from Kazan Helicopters.

Except for Mi-8s, the UPDF/AW operated some Agusta-Bell AB 206s and AB 412s and two Mi-172 salon helicopters, used for VIP transportation. Due to the rugged terrain of northeastern Congo, these helicopters provided vital support services to Ugandan ground troops, not only in regard to fire support – through their machine guns and unguided rockets – but even more so through transportation of supplies and casualty evacuations.

However, the UPDF operations in Congo relied more so on chartered transports from various air freight companies, namely aircraft of Soviet/Russian origin (primarily operated by enterprises associated with Salim Saleh and Victor Bout). Boeing 707s owned by companies based at Ostend in Belgium, and Lockheed L-100s (the civilian variant of the well-known C-130 Hercules) of Ugandan companies, are known to have hauled arms and troops between Entebbe and the DRC throughout the Second Congo War.

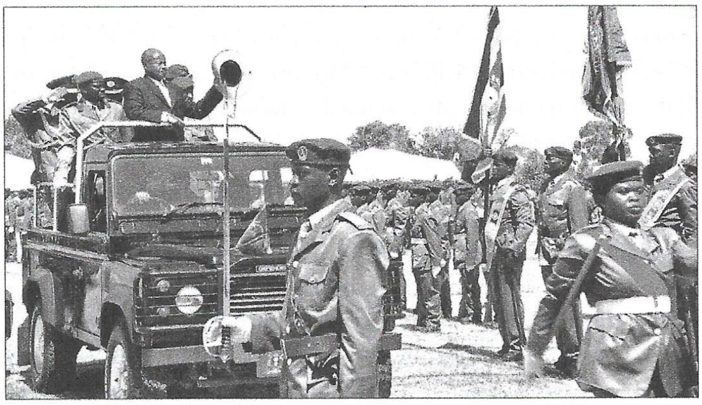
CHAPTER FOUR: OPERATION KITONA

Through the second half of 1997 the Congolese population began to consider the continued Rwandan and Ugandan military presence as an anarchic occupation that imposed a rule of terror. Not only did the RPA react with extreme brutality to the new insurgency launched by the reorganized ALiR and Mayi-Maji militias, but it also became involved in massive human rights violations – even outright ethnic cleansing – in North Kivu in particular. It also intensified the looting of the DRC, transferring large sums of money, as well as coffee, gold, diamonds and coltan, in fact anything it could lay its hands on, to Rwanda. Furthermore, the Rwandans treated the Congolese with a disdain that was heavily resented, at the same time settling Tutsi families from Rwanda, Uganda and North Kivu, requisitioning houses and land, and claiming the best positions in the new administration and military, while randomly arresting and executing traditional chiefs.

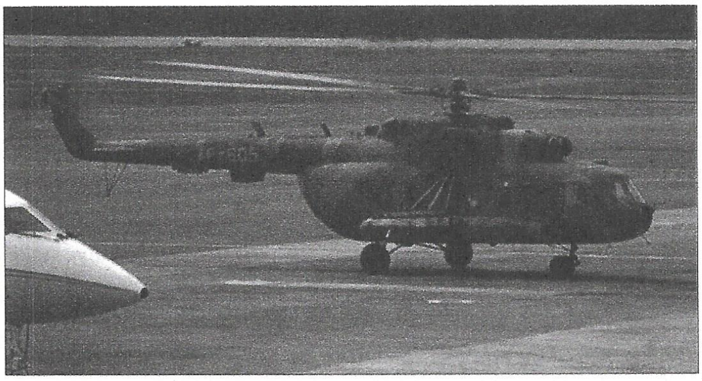
To remedy the problem of ethnic rivalry within the military and decrease the influence of Rwandan Tutsis and Banyamulenge, Congolese president Kabila found no other solution but to install his Katangan friends in crucial positions within the FAC. In other cases, especially where it was impossible to establish and maintain units of his armed forces, he entered alliances with various traditional local militias, the Mayi-Mayi and surviving Rwandan Hutu extremists. The latter move was seen by the Rwandans as a failure to respect Kabila's commitment in relation to recognizing the rights of the Banyamulenge to Congolese nationality and – more importantly – as a threat to their influence in the DRC and thus to the FAC.

By the second quarter of 1998, Kabila was thus not only at odds with Kigali, but indeed isolated domestically and internationally, and in control of less than a handful of larger cities around the country. Tensions between Kabila and Kabarebe increased to the point where some aides to the Congolese president began suspecting the Rwandan general of plotting to assassinate Kabila during the Independence Day festivities on 30 June. From that point on, Kabila's Katangan bodyguards allowed the minister of defence to enter the president's office only after having been bodily searched and disarmed. Eventually Kabarebe was replaced by Celestin Kifwa, Kabila's brother-in-law and an ex-Katangese *Gendarme,* in early July 1998. He was nominated special military adviser to the president, a post with little substance.

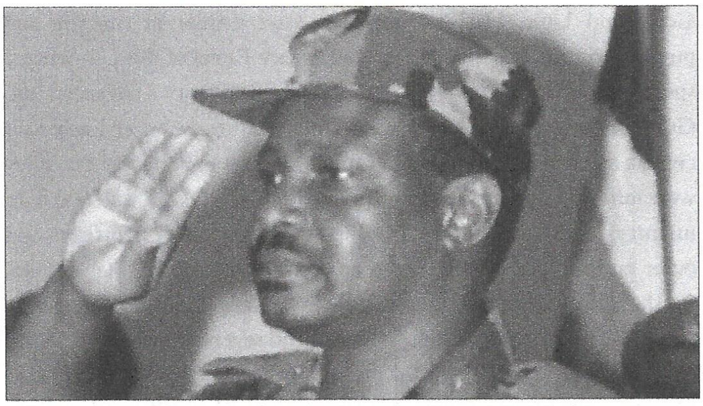
Amid the spread of anti-Tutsi feeling throughout the DRC, Kabila's friendship with Rwanda basically ended in early July. As a result, the Congolese president travelled extensively over the following days, visiting various capitals in and outside Africa, seeking support for his administration. Once back in Kinshasa, on 27 July 1998, he ordered all RPA and UPDF contingents to leave immediately. Two days later the last 600 Rwandan troops still present in Kinshasa were flown back to Kigali, while those deployed elsewhere followed within days.



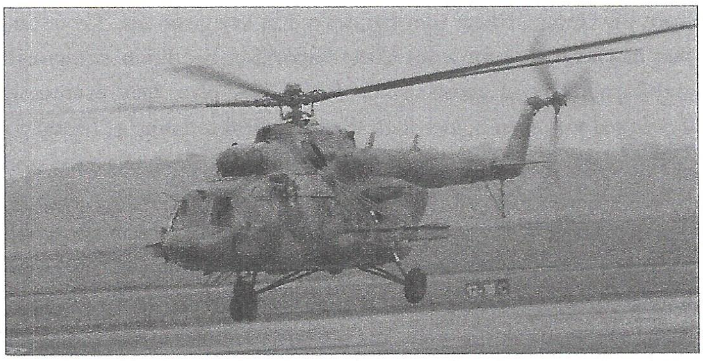
President Museveni inspecting a UPDF unit. *Photo Peter Musomoke*



A UPDF/AW Mi-8MTV-2 (serial AF-605) at Entebbe IAP. It was heavily utilized for transporting supplies in assault operations and even for air attacks early in the Second Congo War. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



Major-General James Kazini was in command of the 2nd Division UPDF and thus in command of Ugandan operations inside the DRC from 1998 until the Ugandan defeat at Kisangani in 2001. *Photo Mark Lepko*



Attrition of the Ugandan helicopter force, often caused by adverse weather, was heavy. The UPDF was eventually forced to purchase several additional batches to reinforce its depleted force. Curiously, all the Mi-17MTV-5s purchased as replacements for older Mi-8MTV-2s received the same serial numbers as their predecessors, as illustrated by this example, serialled AF-603. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

While Ugandan officers were usually trained in Western Europe or elsewhere in Africa (including Zimbabwe until 1998), most NCOs were trained at the Military Academy in Jinja, as seen here. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

Prelude to war

When Kabarebe returned to Kigali, he was reportedly depressed, more as a result of being thrown out of the DRC than because he considered Kabila's position to be shaky and that the president would be easy to topple. Convinced that Kabila had neither the means nor the will to meet his security concerns, Rwandan minister of defence, Paul Kagame, had been preparing a new military operation into the Congo from April 1998 (it seems that this was the reason why several hundred Kinshasa Tutsis had left the country, on all sorts of pretexts, in July 1998), and was thus curious to listen to Kabarebe's advice.

From the standpoint of Rwandan military leaders, their position was much stronger than it had been in 1996. By August 1998, their army had been further strengthened through the establishment of additional units, and many Rwandan officers had recently returned from the Congo, where they had served in key positions. Therefore, they had intimate knowledge of the disposition, condition, equipment and capabilities of most of the FAC. The plan they eventually developed was even bolder than the successful toppling of Mobutu's government. Except for a mutiny within the FAC, Kagame and Kabarebe planned to hit right at Kabila's centre of power in Kinshasa, and thus bring down the very heart of enemy resistance at the outset. Thus came into being Operation Kitona (also known as Operation Kabila II), an extremely risky but, at least potentially, strategically decisive operation. The plan was relatively simple. Using passenger airliners captured from airports in eastern Congo, the RPA would deploy a crack combat force to Kitona AFB in Bas-Congo, rally the ex-FAZ troops held in detention there, and then advance on Kinshasa to instigate a swift and seamless coup. On the way they would shut down Congolese ports on the Atlantic Ocean, cutting off the major supply links to the Congolese capital, and then capture the Inga Dam, which provided power to nearly the entire western DRC, before proceeding directly to Kinshasa. Together with a mutiny within the FAC, which the Rwandans intended to foment all over the country, this was expected to quickly bring down Kabila's government

Soldiers without borders

On the evening of 2 August 1998, General Sylvain Mbuki (CO 10 Brigade FAC), accompanied by his deputy, Jean-Pierre Ondekane (former DSP officer), entered the facilities of the Rwandan-controlled *Radio-Télévision Nationale Congolaise* (RTNC) station in Goma and forced its employees to transmit Mbuki's announcement of a mutiny within the Congolese military and his decision to remove President Kabila from power. As this was aired, commandos of the High Command Unit (HCU) – an RPA asset similar in training and purpose to the Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol of the US Army, a special forces outfit employed deep in enemy territory – advanced into Goma and secured the local airport and at least three, more likely four civilian airliners, and a number of miscellaneous light transports. They were followed by the crack Nguruma Battalion RPA (around 600 light infantry), a self-contained UPDF light artillery unit (31 officers and other ranks in total), as well as a column of trucks bringing supplies. At the Hotel Nyira in Goma, the Rwandans captured Congolese Lieutenant-Colonel Viala Mbeang Ilwa and several other airline pilots. The following day they forced the detained pilots to fly the captured aircraft – including a Goma Air Boeing 727 EL-GPX, a Blue Lines Boeing 727 9Q-CD, a Congo Air Cargo Boeing 707 and an Air Atlantic Cargo Boeing 707 (probably also an unregistered Douglas DC-8 that was subsequently abandoned in Goma) – over nearly 2,000km to

Kitona Air Base in Bas-Congo, where they arrived on the morning of 4 August 1998. The first to land were the two B727s carrying the HCU troops. While the aircraft were still taxiing, they lowered their rear ramps to enable Rwandan commandos to pour out and secure Kitona AFB. The Rwandans then called the remaining two B707s to land and offload their cargo and troops, before all four aircraft were sent back to Goma to pick-up reinforcements and more supplies. At least eight other flights were recorded to have arrived at Kitona later the same day; others followed on 5 August, eventually delivering a total of three RPA battalions, at least one battalion of Ugandan infantry and a small UPDF artillery unit, to within 500km of Kinshasa.

As soon as his troops had secured Kitona, Kabarebe – reportedly accompanied by Jean-Pierre Ondekane – went out to meet his former enemies, allies and subordinates – a mixture of former AFDL commanders, and ex-FAZ officers in charge of (or detained at) the local army base. Following 30 minutes of negotiations, during the course of which Kabarebe expertly exploited his knowledge of the plight of ex-FAZ troops, and coupled with the handover of a few suitcases of dollars, the Congolese agreed to join him. Utilizing the local depots, they reactivated several Type-59 MBTs and Type-62 light tanks, accompanied by a large number of towed ZPU-1 and ZPU-4 machine guns (12.7mm and 14.5mm respectively), and several ZU-23 23mm anti-aircraft cannons. Thus came into being a very specialized task force, consisting of around 3,000 Rwandans and Ugandans, and at least 2,000 (later over 10,000) ex-FAZ, ex-DSP and ex-AFDL officers and soldiers, which Kabarebe assessed would be able to reach Kinshasa within ten days.

On the morning of 5 August, the Rwandan commander launched his advance by moving a column of his troops on Moanda, only six kilometres away, and then the Atlantic Ocean port of Banana. Both towns were secured in the face of very little resistance, in the form of a few minor and disorganized FAC units, mainly consisting of *kadogo*. The Rwandans and their new allies then went on to pillage the warehouses and various banks, before returning to Kitona to renew their advance in an easterly direction. Two days later, on 7 August, Kabarebe's force suddenly appeared in Boma, over 100km east of Kitona, where the first major clash of the operation occurred. Precise details remain unknown, but the firefight against at least a company of FAC resulted in the deaths of several dozen *kadogo*. Subsequently, the RDF and UPDF troops pillaged much of this town, killing 22 civilians and herding dozens of women to the Premier Bassing Hotel, requisitioned by Kabarebe as his HQ, where they were repeatedly raped.

On 10 August, Kabarebe's force – a part of which used military vehicles as its means of transportation, others stolen civilian cars and trucks and even a hijacked train; some (primarily Congolese troops) had to march – secured the port of Matadi, 210km east of Kitona, with its crucial railhead and pipeline terminals. The Ugandan contingent then continued in a northerly direction and three days later secured the crucial Inga Dam. Reportedly, immediately on arrival, Kabarebe ordered the turbines to be stopped, thus depriving all of Kinshasa and most of the Bas-Congo Province of electricity. For the following three weeks the Congolese capital was without power and therefore without running water. The number of victims among the local population caused by this action remains unknown. Furthermore, through the occupation of Banana, Moanda and Matadi, Kinshasa's major supply line and connection to the outside world was cut off too.

Sovereignty Legitimacy

Faced with a near simultaneous Rwandan troop presence in Kitona and an uprising in the Kivus, logistically and militarily, the Kabila government appeared doomed. The best FAC units had joined the mutiny; two well-prepared former allies had not only invaded from the east but also captured the far west of the country. However, it was Kabarebe who was in deep trouble. During the six days of his advance, in the face of very little resistance – even though locally based FAC units outnumbered the Rwandans and their allies, most either fled to Kinshasa or melted into the jungle – his force travelled only 210km. While relatively fast, even for modern armies, it was too slow and, as subsequent developments would show, time was not on Kabarebe's side.

After Kabila and the Zimbabwean president, Mugabe, signed their treaty regarding military cooperation on 4 August, the ZDF went into operations mode. An advance party of one squadron of Zimbabwean SAS and several high-ranking ZDF officers – led by Air Marshal Perence Shiri and Major-General Mike Nyambuya – arrived at N'Djili IAP on 8 August 1998. They were followed by communication and logistic units and additional SAS operatives. After reconnoitring the local situation, and with Kabarebe's force on the verge of capturing the Inga Dam, the Zimbabweans realized that a major deployment of their combat troops was required to save Kabila's government. Thus, on 10 August 1998, the ZDF launched Operation Sovereignty Legitimacy and began deploying a large contingent of troops with the help of Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft chartered from Avient, Air Zaire and several other civilian companies, to Kinshasa. Working feverishly, the Zimbabweans first deployed their paratroopers and a squadron of Cascavel armoured cars to establish a security perimeter around N'Djili IAP, and then did their best to prepare the airfield for a large-scale deployment of their other forces. By 12 August, they had roughly 800 troops – including the better part of the Parachute Regiment – in place.

Frenzied days in Kinshasa

The Zimbabwean troops began arriving in Kinshasa at the decisive moment. Banyamulenge soldiers based at local FAC camps mutinied, provoking a fierce firefight that was to last several days. Although the Banyamulenge were eventually overrun and many summarily executed – only around 260 were detained (together with their families), while a few dozen managed to flee into the jungle west of Kinshasa – this prompted a wave of anti-Tutsi hysteria in the Congolese capital, which was then reinforced through the infiltration of ex-FAZ and ex-DSP officers who had fled or gone to ground when Kabila took power in May 1997.*

Kabila and his officials, supported by radio and television stations, began airing calls for a general mobilization of the population, collectively accusing the Tutsi of being in collusion with Rwandans, and calling on the city's population to arm itself and defend the capital. Thus began a campaign of hunting down the Tutsi and Banyamulenge in general, led primarily by FAC units, the *Police d'Intervention Rapide* (Rapid Intervention Force of the Police, PIR) and the *Inspection de la Police Provincial de Kinshasa* (Kinshasa Provincial Police Inspectorate, IPKIN) that remained loyal to Kabila. Roughly a thousand civilians

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* Camp Kokolo, HQ 50 Brigade FAC, became a particularly notorious example of the fate of the FAC's Banyamulenge soldiers stationed in Kinshasa. Some 160 of them with members of their families were detained there for over a year. Dozens had been killed, burned and buried in mass graves, while female detainees were raped on regular basis.

Aerial view of eastern Goma. The better constructed areas in the background are on the Rwandan side of the border. It was from this direction that Kabarebe's troops assaulted the town on the evening of 2 August 1998. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

The launching point for Operation Kitona, Goma International Airport, as seen in November 2006. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

This Blue Lines Boeing 727, registered 9Q-CDM, was one of at least three, more likely four, airliners requisitioned by Kabarebe's troops, to fly them to Kitona Air Base. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

responded to the call and signed up as members of PCD formations, which embarked on a series of searches in the capital, looking for rebels and their accomplices. In most cases, this meant any civilian thought to belong to these ethnic groups – even those who only bore a physical resemblance to them – being arrested, having their property confiscated, looted or destroyed. But most of the time the security forces committed murder, execution, rape and acts of torture, not only against Tutsis and people of Rwandan origin, but also against political opponents (primarily members of the UDPS and PALU) and ordinary civilians – this with complete impunity. Several hundred people were killed in this wave of state-sponsored violence. Their bodies were usually thrown into the N'Djili and Congo rivers. Arbitrary arrests, rape and summary executions in Kinshasa continued for over a year. Around 1,500 Tutsis and Rwandans who had survived detention in the former Makala prison (renamed *Centre Pénitentiaire et de Re-education de Kinshasa*) were granted permission to leave the Congo in July 1999 on the basis of an agreement between the government, the UNHCR and the ICRC.*

Zimbabwean MiGs

The situation in Bas-Congo meanwhile continued to deteriorate. While deploying a battalion of ex-FAC troops led by Dioudonne Kabangele to secure the town of Mbanza-Ngungu on 11 August, Kabarebe ordered his spearhead RPA battalion to continue its advance and infiltrate Kasangulu, a town on the road connecting Matadi with Kinshasa, some 45km south of the Congolese capital. However, the Rwandans' presence was identified early and they were overrun before they could initiate a major assault, losing 18 killed in the process. Only Kabarebe's third column, that had traversed secondary roads, managed to continue its advance unopposed, reaching the area called Kinsielele, 30km south of Kinshasa, by 17 August, before running out of fuel.

The capture of the Inga Dam, the fall of Mbanza-Ngungu and the infiltration attempt of Kasangulu convinced Shiri and Nyambuya that they were facing a serious crisis. Following an apparently inconclusive meeting of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) – during which Namibia and Zimbabwe offered their support to Kabila; Angola remained on the sidelines and South Africa requested additional talks – they decided not only to deploy additional troops to the DRC, but also a significant contingent of their air force. Therefore, on 17 August 1998, a general alert was sounded at Harare-Manyame and Gweru air force bases and AFZ personnel were ordered to prepare for deployment to the DRC.

The first to go were helicopters, including a detachment of eight Alouette IIIs of No. 7 Squadron, deployed to N'Djili by chartered Il-76s. Some of these were primarily used for transport and liaison, others, called G-Cars, for heliborne assault and K-Cars, armed with a 20mm cannon firing out of the port door, for fire support. The Alouettes were followed by four much larger AB 412s of No. 8

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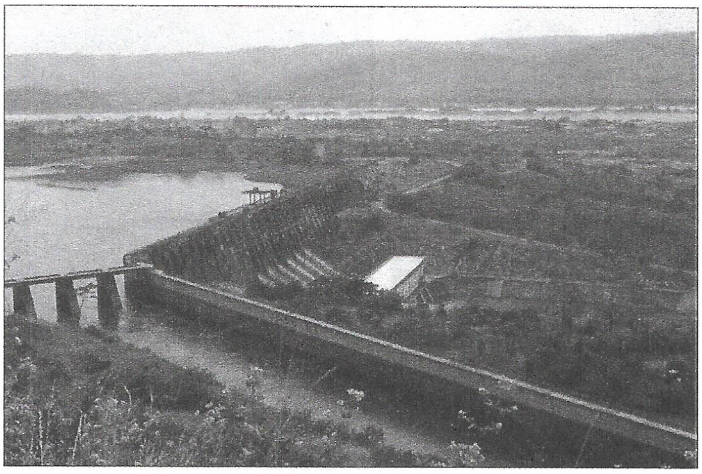
* Such behaviour was not limited to Kinshasa. In Kananga, in the Kasai Oriental Province, the troops of 20 Brigade FAC arrested some 70 of their Tutsi colleagues at the Officer Training College. Dozens were subsequently murdered, many beaten to death with hammers, and their bodies thrown into the River Luha.

Another image of the same B727 (9Q-CDM). Due to its rear entry ramp (which is lowered from within the rear lower fuselage), it proved highly useful for the purpose of assaulting Kitona AFB. Eventually the aircraft was returned to Goma IAP and abandoned there, where this photograph was taken in October 2006. *Photo Michael Fabry*



The strategically important Inga Dam, captured by the Ugandan contingent of Kabarebe's force on 13 August 1998. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

Military facilities on the northern side of N'Djili IAP where the AFZ ZDF established their main base in mid-1998. It was from these hangars that the Zimbabweans operated all their combat aircraft and helicopters. *Photo Bundeswehr*

Squadron which proved unsuitable for transport by Il-76s and had to be partially dismantled before loading.

On 19 August, the AFZ C-212 transports also became involved in the air bridge that was established between Harare and N'Djili, and which also included several civilian Douglas DC-3s from Zimbabwe. Furthermore, that day four FB 337G Lynx light strikers took off toward the Congo, followed two days later by four Hawk Mk 60 jet fighters. At N'Djili the AFZ ground crews and ZDF paras scrambled to unload their weapons and belongings, prepare the necessary ground equipment, establish storage and servicing facilities and construct defences. They found the condition of the airport very poor; many installations had not only been looted but were outright inadequate or of sub-standard quality. However, the Zimbabweans made do with what was available.

By 22 August, the ZDF had one SAS squadron and 800 paras, supported by 15 Cascavels, some 20 pilots and 50 AFZ ground personnel, eight light strikers and fighter jets and around a dozen helicopters at N'Djili. The AFZ Griffon helicopters were reassembled and ready for action by 0800 that day. The Hawk pilots reported for duty at 1400. The latter were immediately scrambled to hit a Rwandan-led column in Celo, near Matadi. As soon as the jets returned, they were swiftly turned round and flew another strike against targets in the Kisantu area, prompting the Congolese mutineers who found themselves on the receiving end, to claim two Zimbabwean MiGs as shot down.*

In fact, the AFZ suffered no losses at all during this period. Not expecting to encounter air power during their advance on Kinshasa, Kabarebe and his troops hadn't taken their MANPADs with them, and now it was too late to fly them in from Kigali – FAC mutineers and Ugandans did not possess any. Correspondingly, instead of wreaking havoc on Zimbabwean aircraft and helicopters, Kabarebe's troops depended on air defence provided by the ex-FAC contingent who were relatively well equipped with ZPU-1 and ZPU-4 heavy machine guns, but who were poorly trained in this discipline. The result was that the advancing allies began suffering heavy blows. Indeed, the lack of MANPADs would cost Kabarebe dearly on 24 August when an AFZ Lynx, on a reconnaissance sortie, found and attacked the main column of ex-FAZ mutineers, including a number of Type-59 and Type-62 tanks approaching Kasangulu. After reporting his target to HQ at N'Djili, the pilot attacked using Matra F2 pods for unguided 68mm rockets, destroying the lead tank and temporarily stopping the column. His timely report then enabled the ZDF to deploy its SAS operatives and paratroopers farther down the road. In a rush to reach Kinshasa, the mutineers drove straight into an ambush in which several of their vehicles were knocked out by RPG-7 fire and all the tanks were captured by the Zimbabweans. With this, the heaviest component of Kabarebe's force was largely written off in a single blow, and he was already five days behind schedule.

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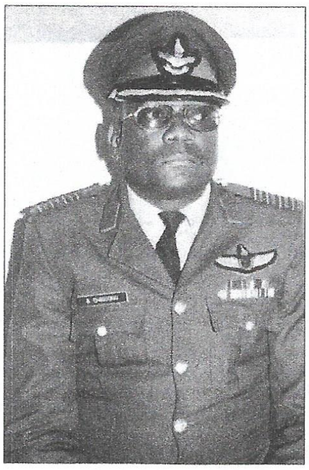
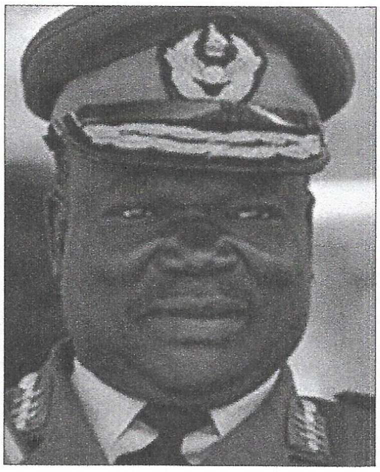
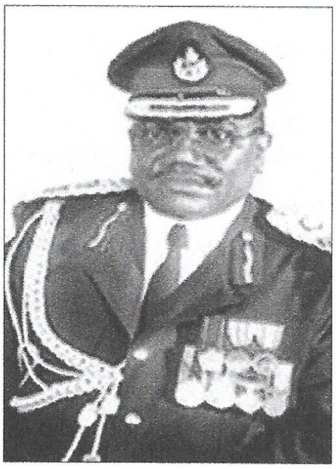
* On 29 August 1998, two political leaders of the RCD, Karaha and Bugera, appeared in their first press conference in Goma. After declaring themselves pro "civilian and political leadership for the rebellion", Karaha – who presented himself as the foreign minister of the RCD – then went on to add, "two Zimbabwean MiG fighters were shot down during the battles on the western front, specifically between the Port of Matadi and Mwanda." From that time on, regardless of what type of AFZ aircraft they encountered, or claimed to have shot down, the RCD insurgents, Rwandans and Ugandans generally reported these as Zimbabwean MiGs (with a few exceptions, they would report such aircraft as Mi-17 jet fighters, Mil-3 or M-135 gunships, helicopters armed with flame-throwers, Sudanese Antonov bombers, and South African Mirage F.1s and USAF B-52 bombers). This line was maintained throughout the war. While this might appear funny at first, it was unsurprising considering the significant number of very different aircraft deployed during the conflict, coupled with the general lack of knowledge regarding their identification.



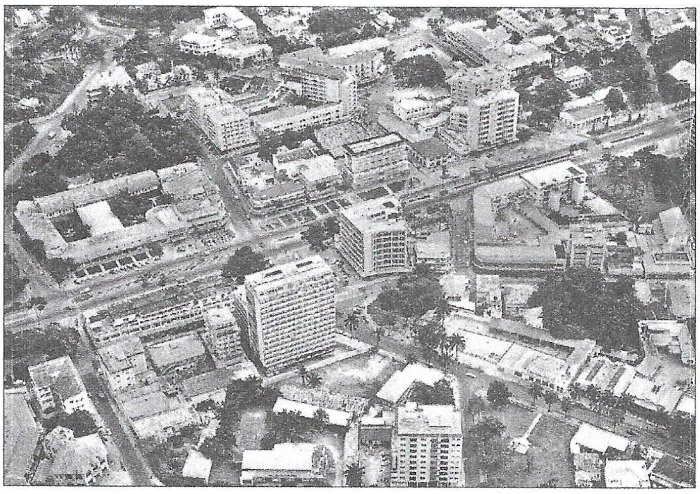
Group Captain Biltim Chingono served as director of air operations at N'Djili and liaison officer between Shiri, Nyambuya, the joint AFZ/ZDF headquarters at N'Djili and the high command FAC in Kinshasa. *Photo ZDF*



Air Marshal Perence Shiri, C-in-C AFZ, was the supreme commander of all Zimbabwean troops deployed to Kinshasa during Operation Sovereignty Legitimacy. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



Major-General Mike Nyambuya, commander of ZDF forces deployed at N'Djili. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



Downtown Kinshasa as seen in the 1970s. These streets saw much frenzied violence during early August 1998, even before Kabarebe's force had approached the Congolese capital. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

Knife in the back

On the morning of 23 August, Kabarebe received alarming reports about an air and land attack on Kamina AFB. Within hours it was known that Angola had entered the war. This was a major surprise for the RPA commander. Prior to launching Operation Kitona, the director of the Rwandan Patriotic Army military intelligence service, Colonel Patrick Kargeya, conducted a number of meetings with senior officials in Luanda, primarily General Manuel Helder Vieira 'Kopelipa' Dias, minister of state and military adviser to President dos Santos, and General Fernando Garcia Miala, director of Angola's external security service and military intelligence. Dias and Miala provided their assurances that Angola would not intervene. However, unbeknown to Kargeya, the subject of these meetings was not made known to dos Santos – who remained a staunch supporter of Kabila. Dos Santos had the final word on all security-related issues and thus, when learning about the Rwandan deployment to Kitona and its advance on Kinshasa, he ordered the FAA and the FANA into a counteroffensive. The Rwandans thus found themselves facing the unexpected Zimbabwean appearance as well as the opponent they considered their most dangerous military enemy, Angola, literally delivering the 'knife in the back' to Operation Kitona.

Due to problematic terrain and poor road networks, the Angolan military needed several days to position its forces before they could launch their advance into the DRC. Similarly, the FANA first had to deploy its combat aircraft and helicopters to Cabinda airfield, which was the only one close enough to the future battlefield. There they had concentrated in flights of six Sukhoi Su-25s and Aero L-39s, around a dozen Mi-24s and a similar number of Mi-17s, flown by Angolan pilots and ten foreigners, including at least one American and one former pilot of the Yugoslav Air Force.

The Angolan attack was launched on 22 August 1998 with a series of air strikes against Rwandan and rebel columns moving supplies from Kitona toward Matadi and Kasangulu. Strongly supported by Mi-24s, the FAA troops – led by a battalion from the *Briada de Commandos* – reached Kitona the next morning. The ex-FAZ troops and their Rwandan officers put up fierce resistance with the fighting lasting six days. Even after being forced to withdraw from Kitona – Kabarebe's rearguard withdrew to Banana and Moanda – its survivors only surrendered about a week later.

The southern group of Angolan forces swiftly captured Boma, but the FAA troops did not fare any better in the course of this operation than the Rwandans and ex-FAZ troops had three weeks earlier. They pillaged several hospitals and many homes in the town, raping 30 women and executing whomever they suspected of colluding with their enemy. Many FANA Mi-17 helicopters, involved in transporting supplies to the advancing mechanized columns, returned to Angola full of loot. Unsurprisingly, the rest of the southern FAA force required nearly a week to force the Rwandan rearguard to evacuate the port of Matadi and withdraw in the direction of Kasangulu on 29 September. Some 20 RPA soldiers and a similar number of ex-FAZ troops, captured in Matadi, were summarily executed, along with Congolese Tutsis. Meanwhile, the FAA troops went on to pillage the Mvuadu and Kinkanda neighbourhoods, again raping dozens of women and girls. Eventually, the Angolan advance into the DRC decelerated to such an extent that the Zimbabweans in Kinshasa felt forced to launch an operation to liberate the Inga Dam on their own. The dam was retaken by the SAS in a heliborne operation that resulted in a short clash with some Ugandans and Rwandans, most of whom were captured on 1 September 1998.

Battle for N'Djili airport

Angola's entry into the war was initially a shock for the Rwandans, but by now Kabarebe had nearly 15,000 troops under his command and his spirits were high. Instead of giving up after being defeated in Kasangulu for the second time, he drew up a new plan, deciding to capture N'Djili IAP on the morning of 26 August. Kabarebe knew that the Zimbabweans were numerically inferior and could not hold a wide or deep front, nor depend on the shaky FAC for support. Furthermore, underestimating the Zimbabwean determination,

An Alouette III of the Air Force of Zimbabwe. This relatively small but versatile helicopter used by many African air forces, proved easily adaptable to a number of different tasks. Among others, the AFZ deployed it as a gunship, armed with a 20mm cannon firing out of the left cabin door. Such K-Cars were the centrepiece of Zimbabwean combat tactics during the early phases of the Second Congo War. *Photo Tom Cooper Collection*

The Agusta-Bell AB 412 was the second helicopter type the AFZ dispatched to the DRC. Initially used for troop transport, several were armed with a twin machine-gun mount installed in the doors, and they proved highly effective in the G-Car role as well. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

The third aircraft the AFZ deployed to the DRC was the CASA C-212 light transport. Constructed for transport of supplies and troops around the battlefield, the pilots of No. 3 Squadron operated these aircraft from simple grass strips and under most primitive circumstances. *Photo Tom Cooper Collection*

Kabarebe expected that his advance on the centre of their resistance would collapse the ZDF's defence from within.

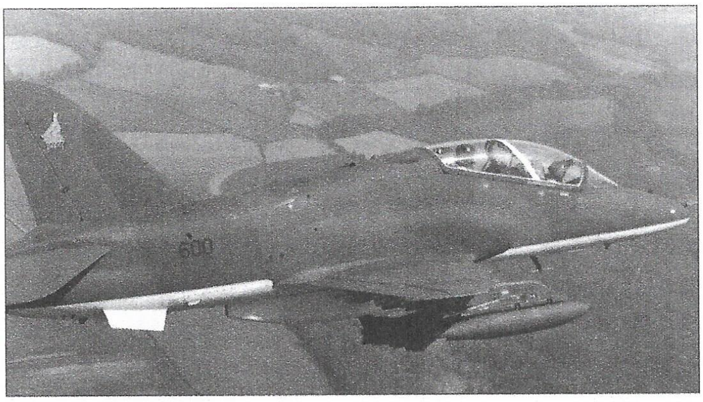
On the opposing side, lacking numbers and unable to establish a coherent front line, Major-General Nyambuya reacted with a very flexible deployment, aimed at buying time until additional ZDF troops could arrive. As such, the clash in Kasangulu on 24 August coincided with the arrival of the next large ZDF contingent, including 1,000 commandos and infantry soldiers, deployed with the help of chartered civilian airliners (including at least one Congolese Air Lines B727). Expecting the Rwandans to employ their *rezzou* tactics – a combination of infiltration and swift raid – directly at N'Djili IAP on the morning of 25 August, he deployed several SAS teams to establish blocking positions in a semicircle some 40km around Kinshasa, with the aim of ambushing enemy columns in order to slow them down, or call in AFZ air strikes. This decision proved highly successful, following which the SAS, Hawks and Lynxes ambushed a train hijacked by the rebels and hit several columns, further postponing Kabarebe's advance. By the morning of 26 August, the Rwandans had only reached the southern outskirts of Kinshasa and were still 30km from N'Djili.

Kabarebe then pulled his next trick, rushing a column of ex-FAZ troops, disguised as retreating FAC-troops, toward N'Djili IAP, and another in the direction of the presidential palace. The first column approached the airport without any interruption. They were identified as enemy combatants by the crews of several ZDF Cascavels when they were only less than 100m away. With heavy machine guns the Zimbabwean armoured cars opened a murderous fire, mowing down most of Kabarebe's troops. The Zimbabweans suffered no casualties, but were still reeling from shock when the first wave of Rwandans and additional ex-FAZ troops appeared. This time the numbers tipped the balance and the RPA troops and Congolese mutineers managed to capture not only the western threshold of the 4,700m-long runway of N'Djili IAP, but also the main terminal and all the hangars on the southern side. However, the ZDF remained in possession of the control tower, where a small group of paras and SAS snipers was entrenched. For the next few days they poured a heavy volume of fire into enemy lines, causing extensive casualties.

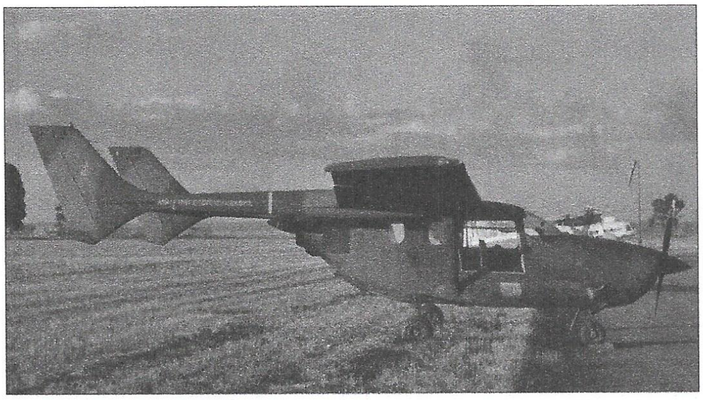
The speed and size of Kabarebe's attack on the airport came as a surprise to the Zimbabweans, but they recovered rapidly, scrambling all the available troops and aviators into defence. All Hawks, Lynxes and helicopters were airborne within minutes. Together with the paras they began pounding enemy positions. Two Alouette III G-Cars, loaded with SAS troops, were rushed to the presidential palace where they extracted Laurent Kabila. He was brought to N'Djili, put into his presidential jet and flown out to Lubumbashi. Meanwhile, the FAC pushed several convoys of Katangan troops and heavy equipment through the city, deploying tanks and armoured personnel carriers to set up roadblocks. However, the Rwandans infiltrated these as well as the ZDF force at N'Djili, leaving the Zimbabweans cut off and on their own. The Hawks, Lynxes, AB 412s and Alouettes continued pounding Rwandan and ex-FAZ troops throughout the day, forcing them to halt further attacks and entrench around the western threshold.

The heaviest fighting for N'Djili began on the morning of 27 August when Kabarebe deployed his last few Type-59 and Type-62 tanks, as well as a significant number of anti-aircraft guns in support of his next attack. Supported by Cascavels, the Zimbabwean SAS, the para battalion and the commando group held off and routed the first wave, while the Hawks, Lynxes, AB 412s and Alouettes flew one strike after the other, knocking out the enemy's heavy equipment. The fighting died down during the late morning as both sides attempted to find some cover from the searing heat, but was renewed in the late afternoon. This assault was beaten back after all remaining tanks and heavy weapons under Kabarebe's command were knocked out.

During the day the Zimbabwean aircraft had been taking off using the northern half of the runway, usually getting airborne downwind



Within only a few hours of their arrival at N'Djili, the AFZ Hawks were pressed into combat to strike elements of Kabarebe's force between Celo and Kisantu. This pre-delivery photograph shows one of the Hawks equipped with dual bomb racks and armed with a total of four 125kg bombs under each wing, as well as a gun pod containing a 30mm ADEN cannon under the centreline – a weapons configuration often used during the fighting in August 1998. *Photo BAe*



Much overshadowed by the appearance of the AFZ Hawks was the deployment of Cessna FB 337G Lynx light strikers of No. 4 Squadron. One of these aircraft was responsible for destroying practically the entire tank force under Kabarebe's command on 24 August 1998. *Photo Tom Cooper Collection*

and passing at low level over the Congo River, before turning round to attack. The speed of the AFZ operation was such that no one had had time to even eat. Even the medics and caterers were shuffling bombs and ammunition boxes to the aircraft. Refuelling and arming became everyone's business, with the armourers concentrating on the safety checks. With the enemy so close to their base, the Hawks and Lynxes were able to take up maximum amounts of bombs and rockets. Their engines were not even turned off between successive sorties. The average turnaround time between missions was reduced to less than five minutes. The flying was so intense that three helicopters and one Lynx became due for maintenance, and the required servicing was undertaken the following night after the necessary spares were delivered to N'Djili by transport aircraft.

Early on 28 August, Major-General Mike Nyambuya ordered his troops into counterattack. The SAS and commandos successfully recovered the main terminal, but were then stopped by Rwandan and ex-FAZ troops entrenched around the western threshold. This position was neutralized by several rounds of heavy strikes by AFZ fighters and helicopters, and in the afternoon the Zimbabwean troops, supported by Cascavels, forced Kabarebe to further withdraw and establish a new defensive line along a creek, southwest of the airport. By evening, even this line was breached, and the Rwandans and mutineers withdrew into the Kimbanseke and Masina neighbourhoods of N'Djili, where they engaged ZDF troops in savage trench warfare in these built-up areas for the next two days. Finding few places to take cover, Kabarebe's men began using churches as their strongholds as these, due to the nature of their construction, proved solid and offered protection against Zimbabwean air strikes. In most cases, the ZDF had no choice but to strike the churches, causing substantial structural damage. Over 300 civilians were killed in the course of the fighting, while thousands were forced to flee. Nevertheless, the Congolese population generally greeted the Zimbabweans and congratulated them on a job well done.

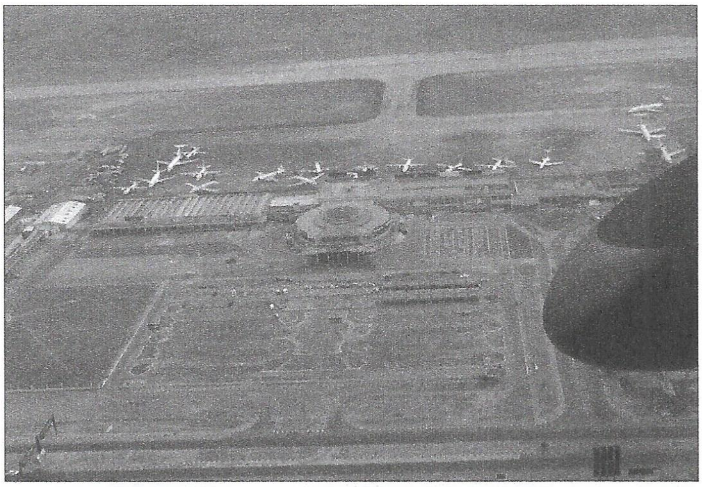
Still, the only combat support the Zimbabweans received in the course of these four days consisted of one South African pilot (a former EO employee) and one ex-FAZA pilot. The South African was the only qualified to fly the two Mi-24s abandoned by the former Zairian Air Force – coded 9T-HM1 (equipped with two 30mm cannons) and 9T-HM2 (equipped with the standard 14.5mm cannon in rotating barbette). He operated individually, even though in close cooperation with the AFZ. A Congolese pilot, qualified to fly one of the three ex-FAZA MB 326s the Zimbabweans had found a way to N'Djili and offered his services. Assigned to the Hawk squadron, he flew only one sortie, in the course of which he separated from the formation, failed to find his target and eventually landed wheels up, rendering his aircraft inoperable.

View of Matadi – a crucially important port on the Congo River connecting Kinshasa with trans-Atlantic traffic. *Photo Butembo*

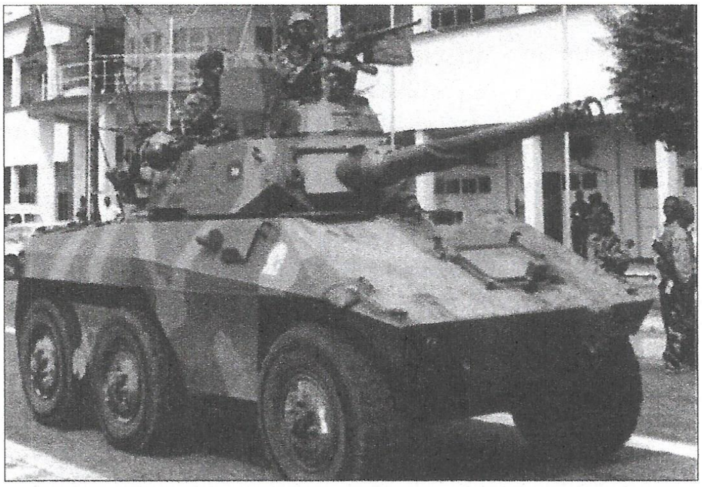
Nevertheless, the situation in southern Kinshasa was stabilized during the night to 30 August when the Rwandans and their allies fell back toward the south. Operation Kitona thus ended in disaster for the allied Rwandan forces. The reason it did not end in the total annihilation of Kabarebe's force lay in several fateful decisions made by the Congolese and Zimbabweans over the following days.

Kabarebe's escape

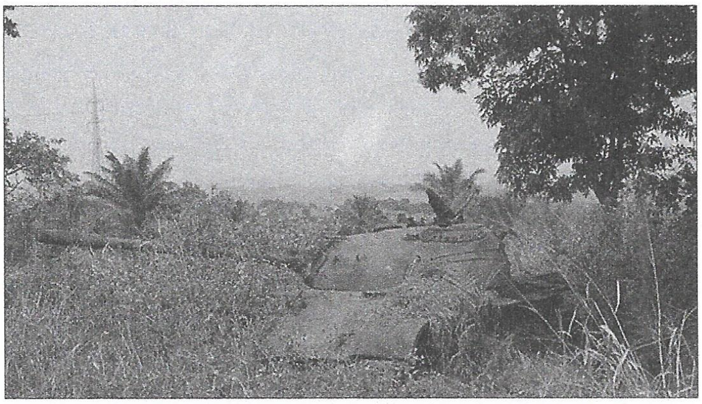
After his defeat in Kinshasa, Kabarebe rapidly withdrew the surviving RPA and UPDF troops in the direction of Kisantu, abandoning around 15,000 dazed ex-FAZ and ex-AFDL mutineers to their own devices. Short on ammunition and supplies, at least 1,500km away from their nearest allies in the Kivus, the Rwandans and Ugandans were surrounded by the enemy on three sides. They could not withdraw toward Matadi and Kitona as these were already under Angolan control. Kinshasa was safely under combined FAC and ZDF control, and there was no way they could escape over the Congo River



The main terminal at N'Djili IAP. *Photo Bundeswehr*



A Zimbabwean EE-9 Cascavel armoured car, guarding the main terminal of N'Djili IAP in late August 1998. *Photo ZDF*



Although precise details remain unknown, the fighting between the Angolans and the combined Rwandan/Ugandan/Congolese force in the Matadi area saw several fierce clashes, including the deployment of armour and combat helicopters. This tank is either an Angolan T-55 or ex-FAZ Type-59 that was knocked out and abandoned in late August 1998. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

9T-HM2 was serial number of this Mi-35 of the practically non-existent Congolese Air Force. Left behind from the last days of Mobutu's reign, this Hind was one of two available at the time of the battle for N'Djili, when it was flown by a South African pilot, and maintained by Zimbabweans (see also *Great Lakes Holocaust* for further reference on this helicopter). *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

into Congo-Brazzaville; there was also no point in attempting to flee east. They were also cut off from Ugandans grouped around the Inga Dam. This unit had been left behind in the wake of the withdrawal to await annihilation or capture.

In Kinshasa, the FAC and other Congolese security forces were mopping up the few scattered Rwandan, Ugandan and ex-FAZ infiltrators. With their ground units securing Mbanza-Mboma, the Angolans felt safe enough to deploy an FAA detachment to Kitona AFB, including eight MiG-21bis fighter bombers (distributed in two flights, simply known as Flights 1 and 2).

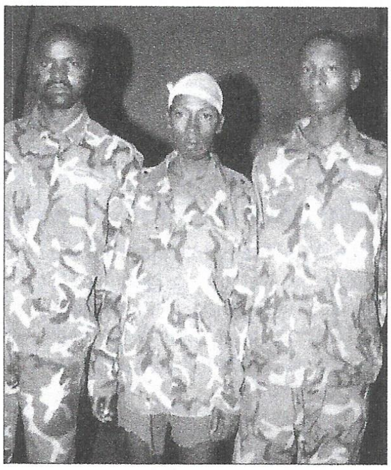
However, these MiGs were never to fly a combat sortie over the DRC. Similarly, at N'Djili, the AFZ pilots were sitting next to their aircraft awaiting orders to strike at the mauled and encircled enemy – but no such orders came, for manifold reasons:

1. Not only Kabila but also the Angolans, Namibians and Zimbabweans expected the fighting to stop after Kabarebe's defeat.
2. Kigali and Kampala requested help from Washington, and the US government applied immense pressure on Kinshasa, Luanda and Harare to spare their defeated enemies. In light of a possible end to fighting, the Congolese asked their allies to allow their defeated enemy to withdraw.
3. Although the Angolan presence in Bas-Congo was massive, the FAA units were far away from the Kinshasa battlefield, and the ZDF presence in the Congolese capital was still limited. Therefore, conducting mopping-up operations was considered secondary to consolidating control over the capital, the Inga Dam and ports on the Atlantic coast.
4. The Angolans, Congolese, Namibians and Zimbabweans agreed to establish a joint headquarters under the command of Air Vice-Marshal Shiri. Shiri's director of air operations at N'Djili and liaison officer for contacts to the FAC and FAA/FANA, Group Captain Biltim Chingono, received intelligence that a deployment of either UNITA-operated MiG-23s and Mi-24s, or Ugandan/Rwandan combat aircraft over the DRC was probable. While the AFZ was keen to pursue the withdrawing Kabarebe force, the Angolans were foremostly concerned about possible UNITA involvement. The Zimbabweans and Angolans operating in blue-on-blue engagements would become practically unavoidable.
5. Not only did the Zimbabwean aircraft and helicopters prove far more suitable to the requirements of the Congolese battlefields than the Angolan MiGs, the AFZ also had well-developed tactical methods of close air support. Having no training, the Congolese joined the combined operations, resulting in massive language barriers.
6. Because of points 4 and 5, the Angolans and Zimbabweans

Flight Lieutenant Charles Mazorodze (engineer and gunner) and two other members from No. 8 Squadron with their AB-412SP Griffon, modified to act as a G-Car through the installation of twin M2 Browning machine guns. Despite countless reports concerning the involvement of foreigners on their side, only Zimbabweans flew and fought for the AFZ during the war, even though No. 8 Squadron included at least one expatriate, Squadron Leader David Atkinson, who had served with the South African Air Force, and who had received Zimbabwean citizenship. *Photo ZDF*

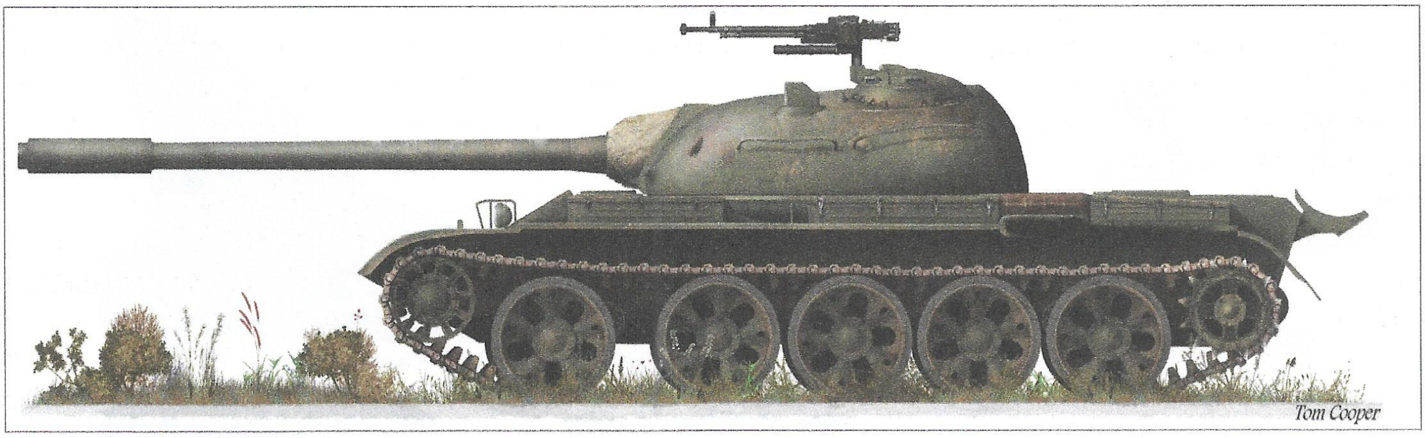
ZIMBABWE
J.J.CHIKUZO
NORMAL
CANOPY OPEN
OTHER SIDE

An AFZ pilot emerging from the cockpit of a Hawk Mk 60 jet. The battle of N'Djili probably saw the best days for the AFZ, when the excellent training, professionalism and combat skills of around 70 Zimbabwean airmen and 800 paratroopers stopped an onslaught of ten times their number. *Photo Katsusiko Tokunaga*

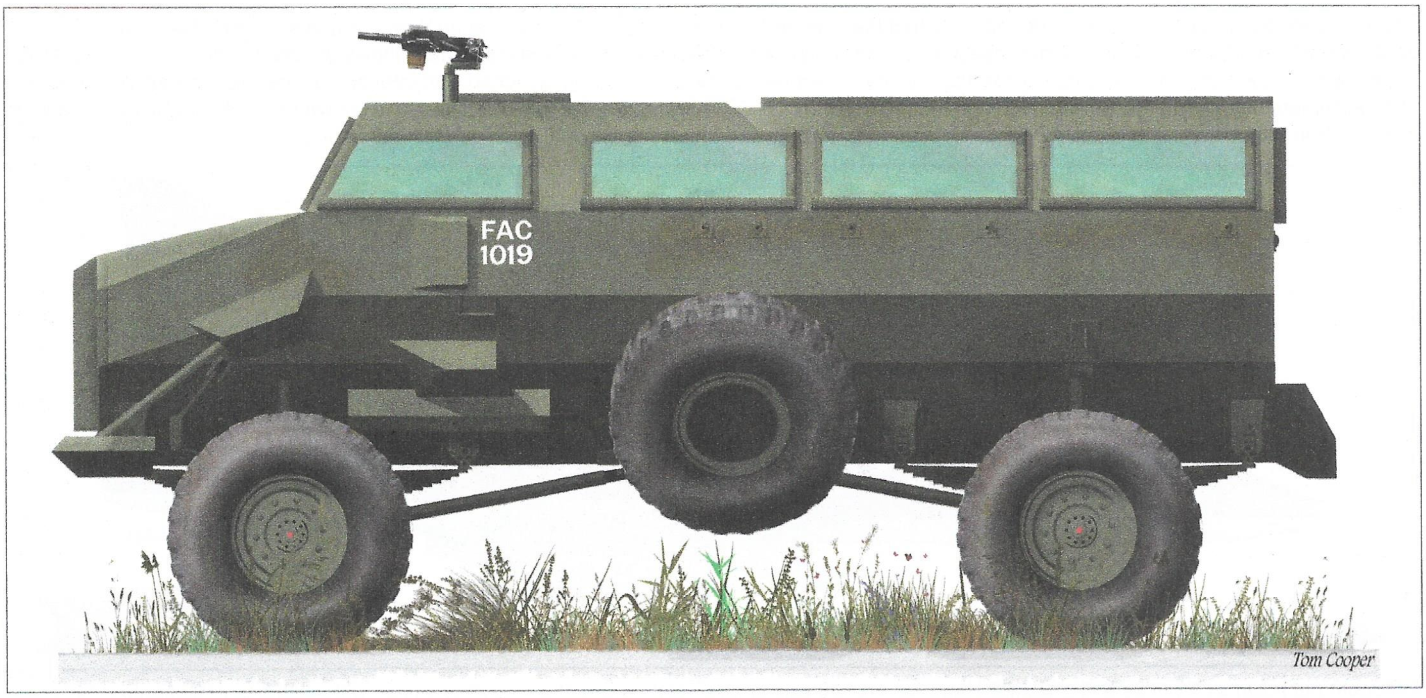


Rwandan Hutus and a UPDF soldier captured by Zimbabwean troops during the battle of N'Djili. They were the first of over 2,000 prisoners the ZDF would take during the Second Congo War. *Photo ZDF*

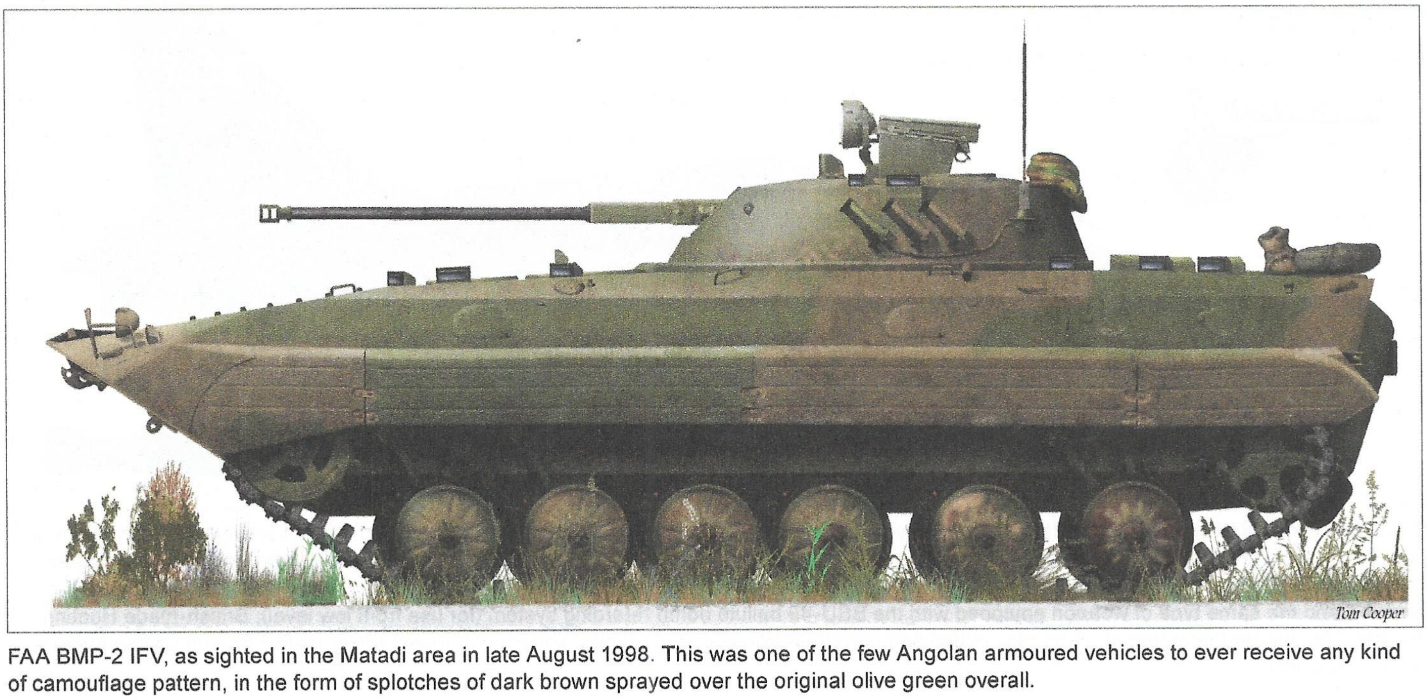
A Cascavel armoured car leads a column of victorious Zimbabwean soldiers through the streets of Kinshasa in a show of force following the defeat of the Rwandan-led advance on the Congolese capital. *Photo ZDF*



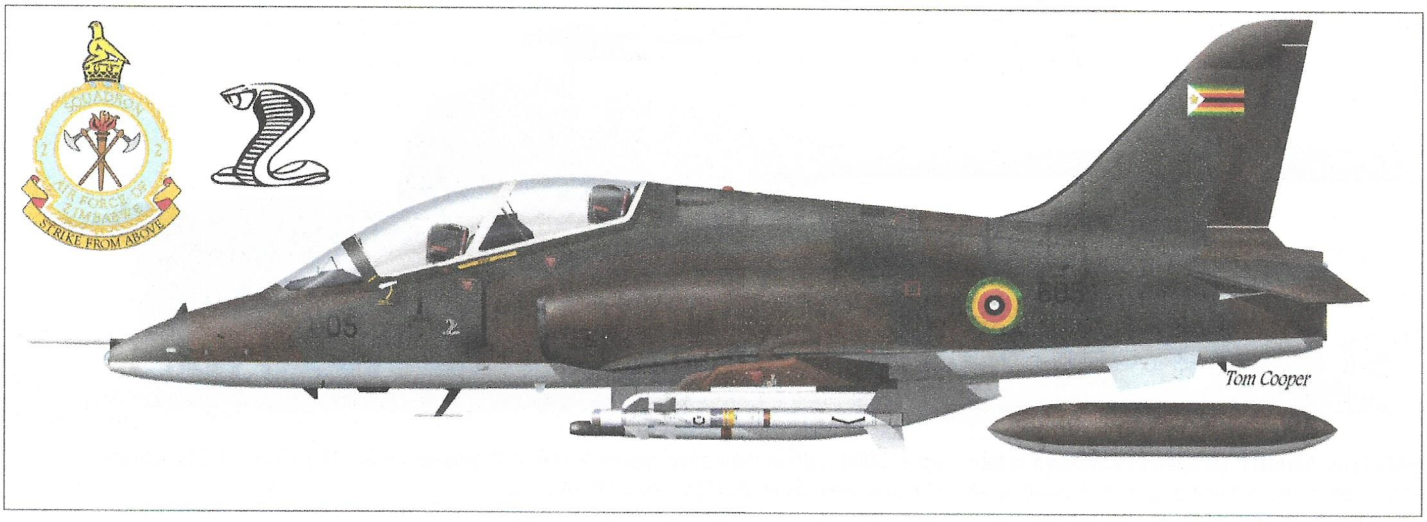
FAC Type-59 MBT, as seen in Kinshasa in late August 1998. Left in their olive-green colour, Congolese tanks of this type usually wore no markings, rather showing signs of having spent extensive periods in storage than of heavy use.



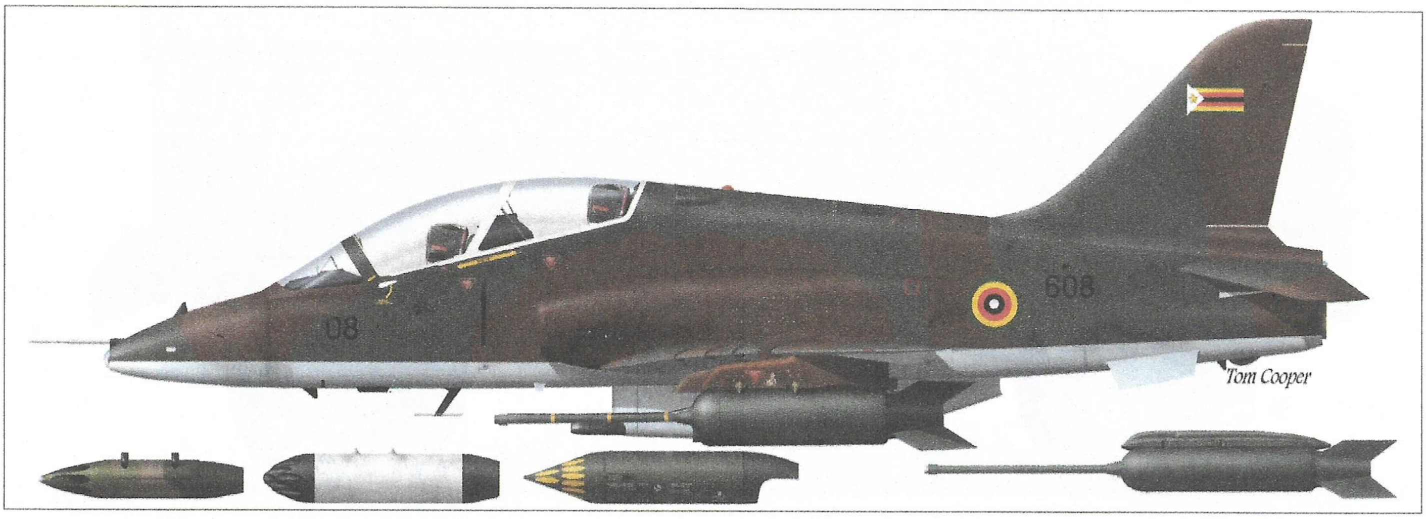
FAC Wolf Turbo MRAP, as also seen in Kinshasa in late August 1998. Few of these vehicles became available to the newly established Congolese army by the time of the Rwandan invasion; several of them – often equipped with Russian-made AGS-17 grenade launchers, as seen here – were deployed during the fighting in the Kinshasa area. The markings as shown on this artwork cannot be precisely confirmed, but they were applied in the given position and size. The Namibian Defence Force also deployed Wolf Turbos during this war which were reportedly painted in a similar fashion.



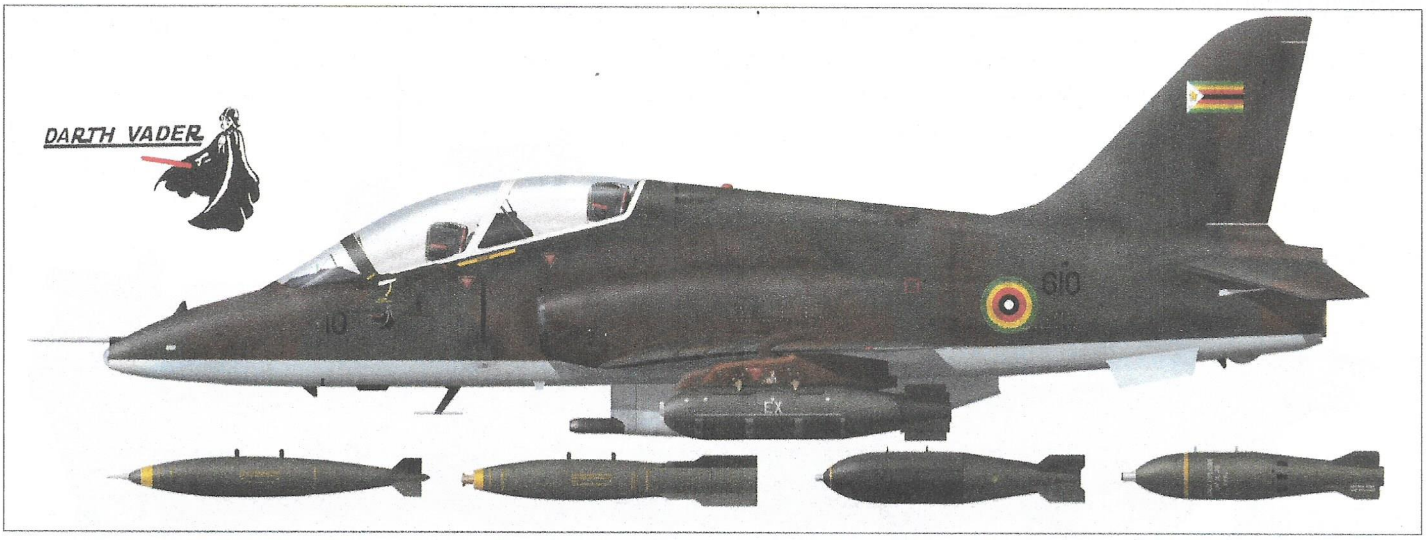
FAA BMP-2 IFV, as sighted in the Matadi area in late August 1998. This was one of the few Angolan armoured vehicles to ever receive any kind of camouflage pattern, in the form of splotches of dark brown sprayed over the original olive green overall.



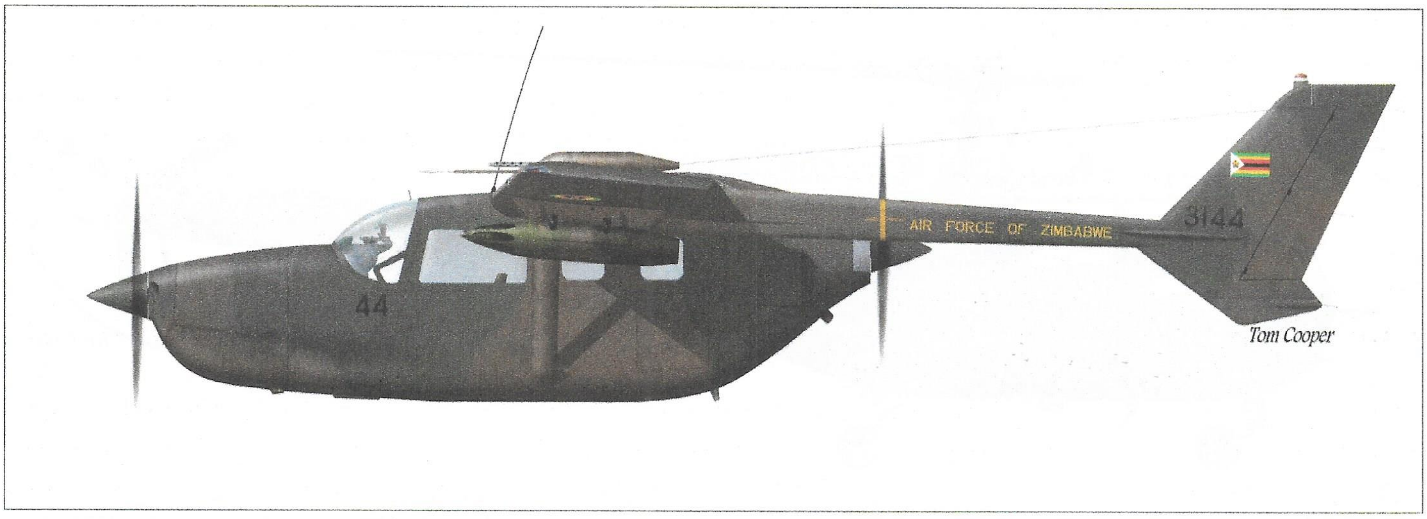
AFZ Hawk Mk 60, serial 605. This aircraft not only had the most flying time during the Second Congo War, but was also one of only two decorated with personal insignia – in this case a small cobra, applied in black and white. The insert also shows the crest of No. 2 Squadron AFZ, while the armament shown here is typical for many of the armed reconnaissance sorties launched with intention of intercepting transport aircraft and helicopters supporting the RPA and ANC in the eastern DRC. A Chinese-made PL-7 air-to-air missile is shown under the outboard underwing pylon, a drop tank behind it, and the ADEN 30mm cannon within its pod under the centreline of the aircraft.



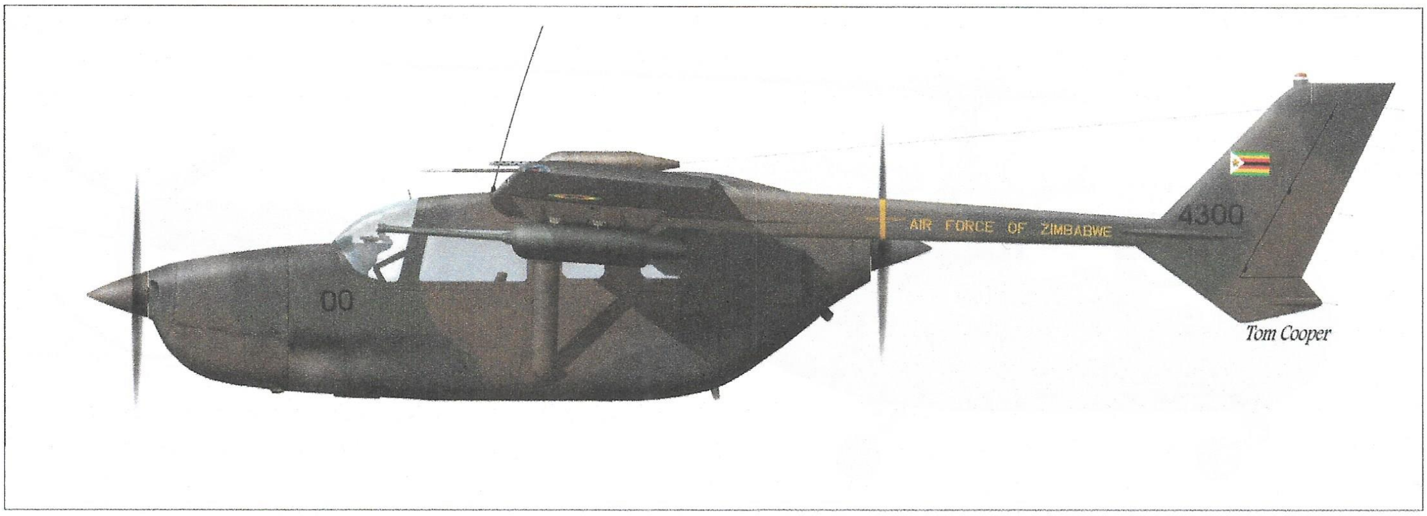
Althought not flown as often as 605, the AFZ Hawk Mk 60 608 was another high-timer. The aircraft is shown with selection of weaponry, of various origin, deployed during the Second Congo War, including (from left): Matra F2 rocket pod (for six 68mm rockets), Matra 116M and Matra F4 rocket pods (each for 19 68mm rockets; notably, the older 116M pod proved less popular as it could only fire all the 19 rockets at once); a 454kg Golf CBU (developed in Rhodesia in the 1970s and still manufactured by ZDI) is shown under the outboard underwing pylon and the 250kg Mini Golf CBU in the lower right corner.



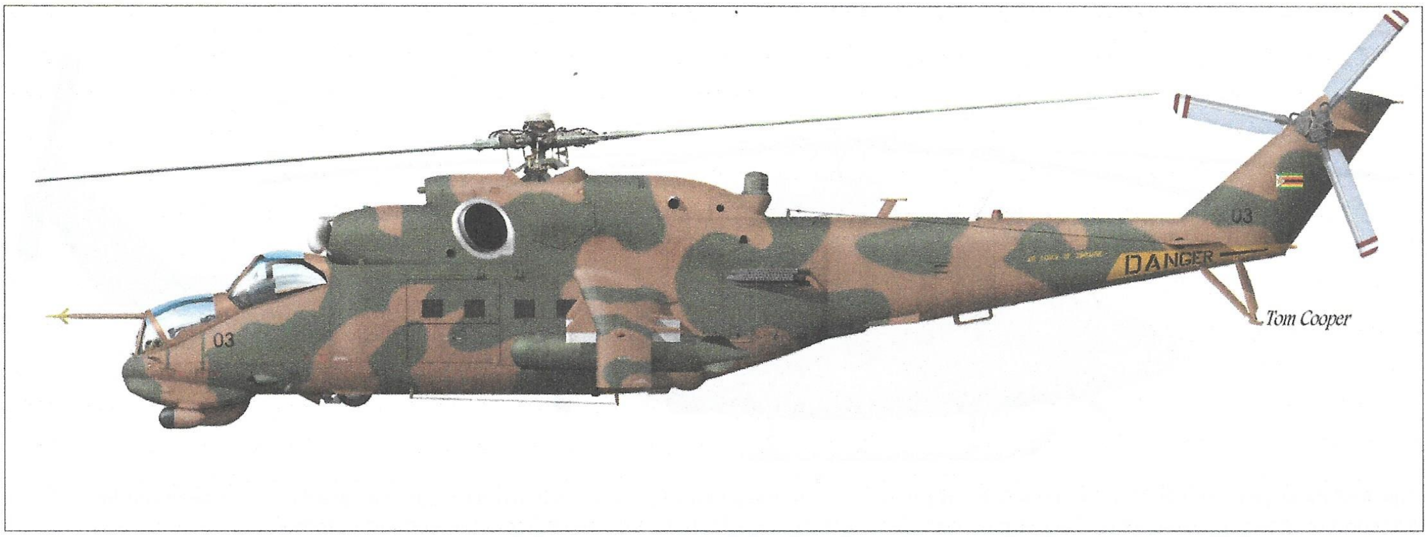
The Hawk Mk 60 610 was the second aircraft of this type deployed in the DRC that wore personal insignia – the small artwork of Darth Vader, a figure from the *Star Wars* movie. The aircraft is shown with the selection of bombs deployed by this type, including (from left): the Argentinean-made BK-BR.250 'slick' 250kg general-purpose bomb (also used were Argentinean-made BK-BR.125 bombs, similar in shape, but slightly smaller) and the same type of weapon equipped with the BSU-49 ballute bomb retarding system (for use from low level); British-made Hunting BL.755 CBU (under the outboard underwing pylon) and general-purpose 454kg bombs, and French-made 400kg SAMP BL.70s (250kg models were also used).



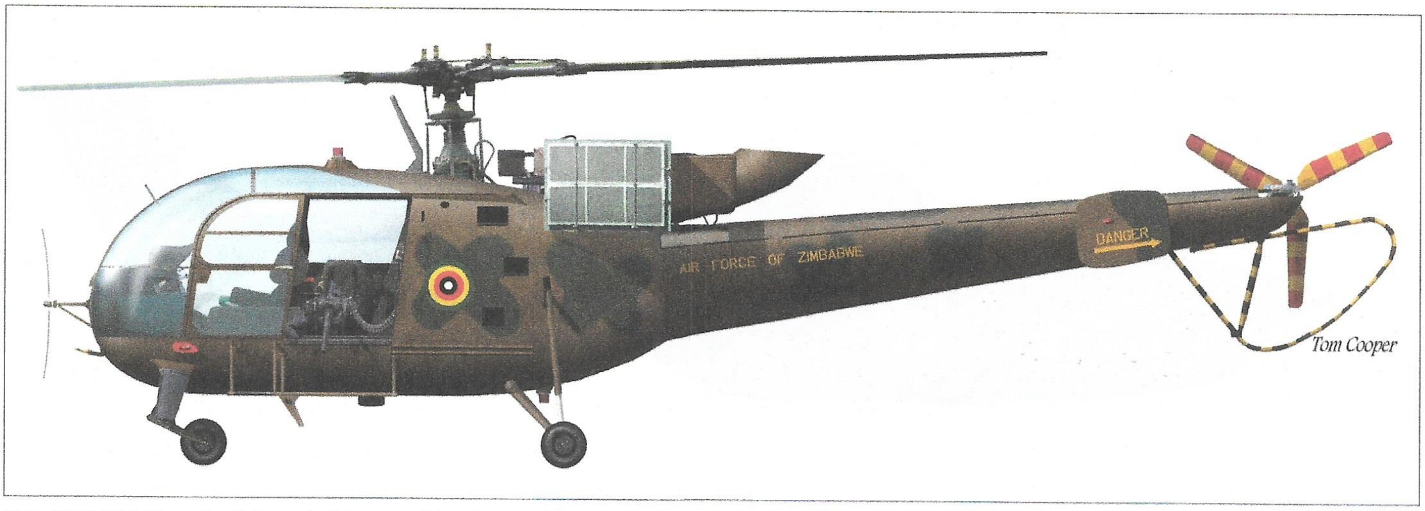
Although their camouflage pattern began showing traces of extremely heavy wear by the time the type was deployed to the DRC, the Zimbabwean Cessna FB 337Gs of No. 4 Squadron were in excellent condition and proved their worth in combat. Apart from most of the bombs used by Hawks (though usually their lighter variants), they primarily deployed Matra F2 rocket pods (larger F4s would have been much too large), and overwing mounted M2 Browning machine guns.



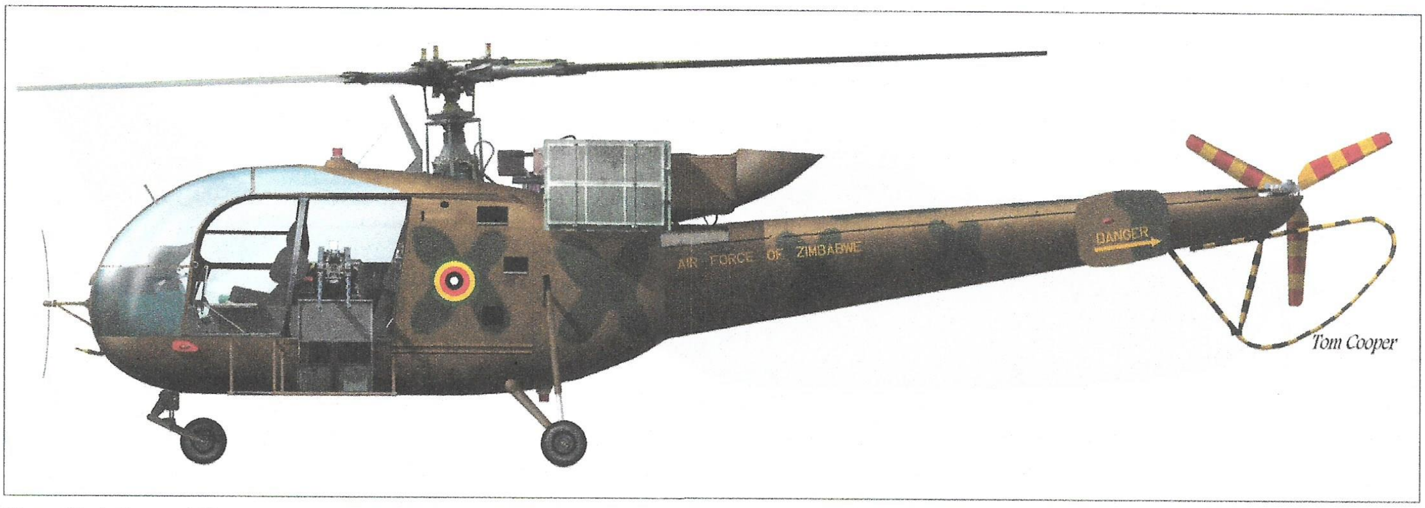
Another FB 337G known to have been deployed to the DRC was this example, shown armed with the Zimbabwean-made 250kg Mini Golf CBU. Equipped with the so-called Daisy cutter fuse, which set the bomb off above the ground, Golf and Mini Golfs were primarily deployed against RPA and ANC infantry units, but also proved murderously effective against soft-skinned convoys.



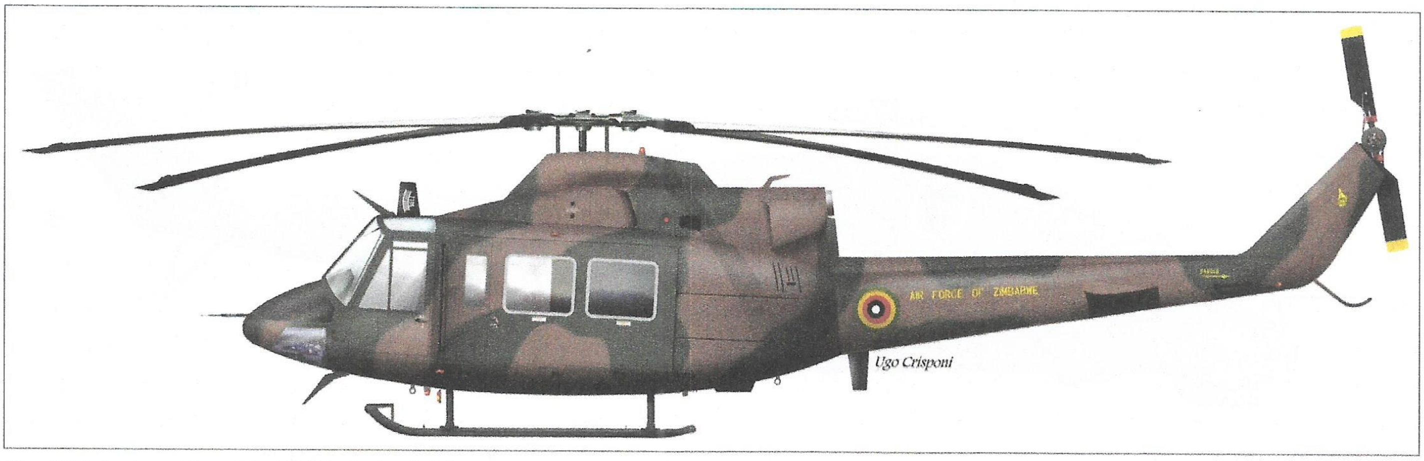
Except for Hawks, another star of the AFZ's deployment during the Second Congo War was six Mi-35s of No. 8 Squadron, of which at least two were Mi-35Ds, equipped with 12.7mm machine guns in the barbette installed under the chin. The others were Mi-35Ps, armed with a twin 23mm cannon installed bellow the right side of the cockpit. Due to extensive ranges over which these relatively short-legged helicopters had to operate, carriage of drop tanks was nearly always necessary. Flare dispensers, installed on the rear side of the cabin, also proved highly effective in deploying decoys that caused dozens of Rwandan MANPADs to miss their targets.


AIR FORCE OF ZIMBABWE
DANGER
Tom Cooper

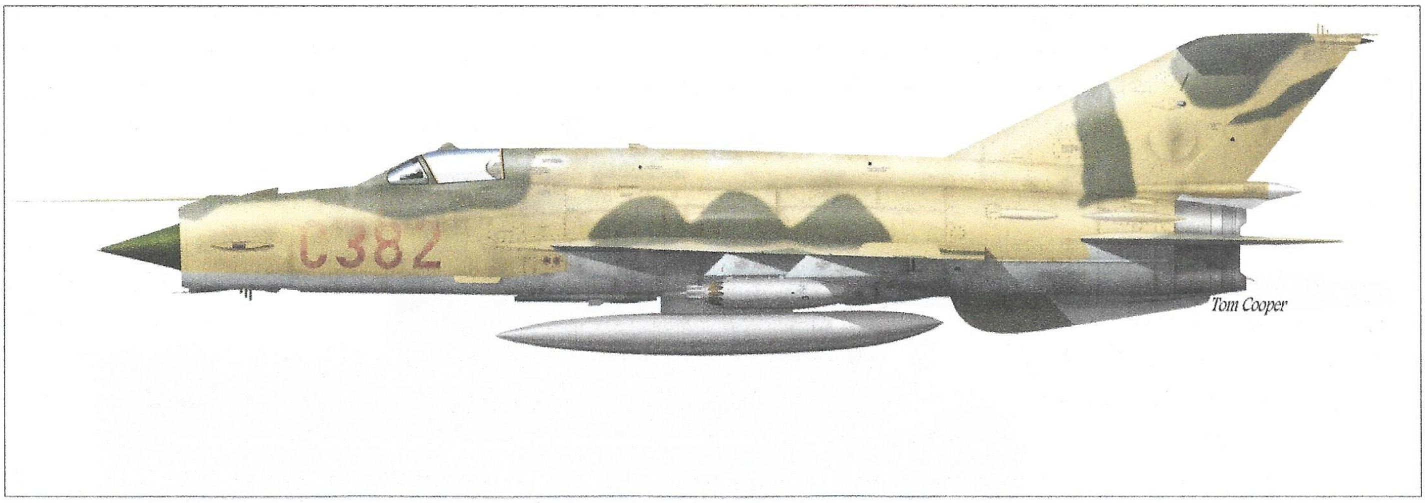
This SA 316B Alouette III is probably one of the former South African examples handed over to the former Rhodesian Air Force in the 1970s and then adapted by the Rhodesians into the deadly K-Car, which included armour protection for the pilot and gunner plus a 20mm cannon installed in the rear cabin. K-Cars were used as airborne command posts with the mission commander usually seated on the floor or on a makeshift seat in the left front part of the cabin.


AIR FORCE OF ZIMBABWE
DANGER
Tom Cooper

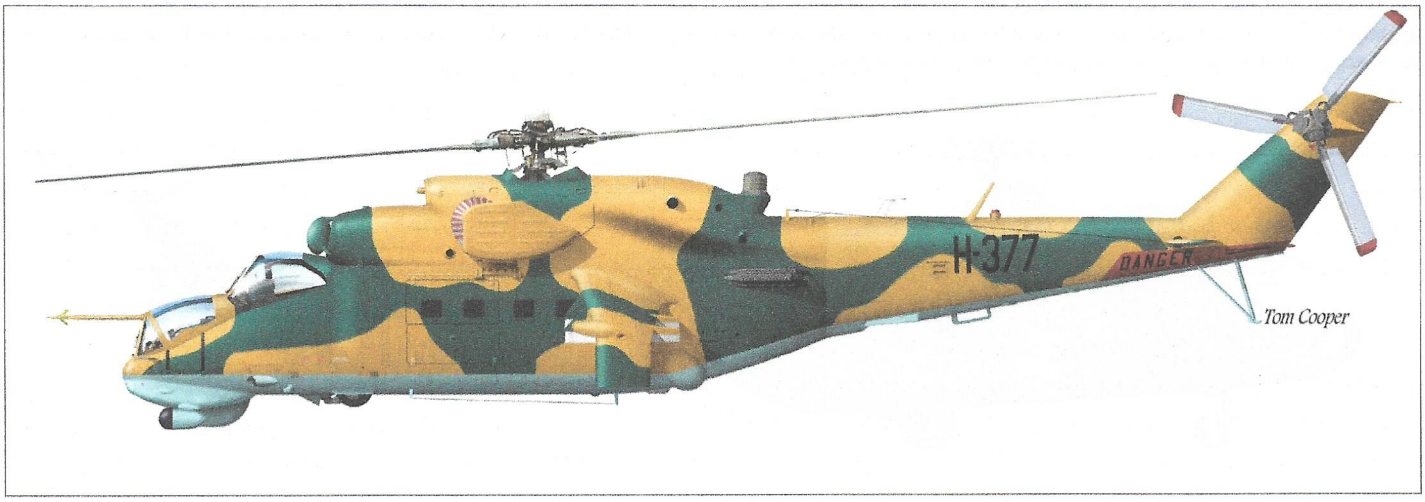
Many Zimbabwean Alouettes were equipped as G-Cars, with twin-mounted .303 Browning machine guns, armoured protection for the pilot and seats for a stick (section) of up to four soldiers.


AIR FORCE OF ZIMBABWE
Ugo Crisponi

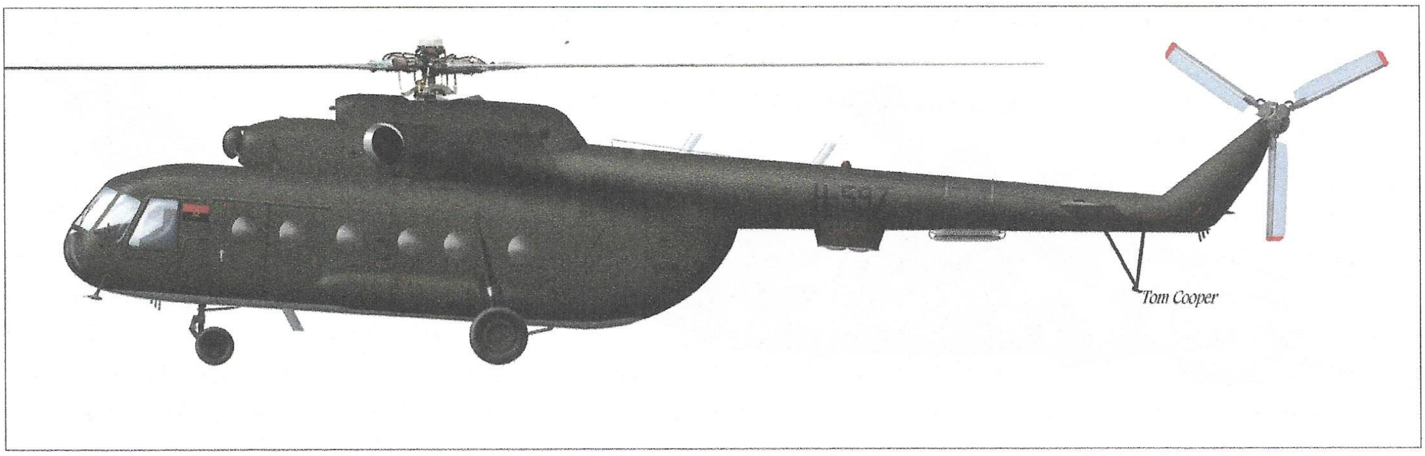
The AFZ deployed four AB 412SPs in the DRC. None is known to have been lost in combat, even though they were not only deployed for transport purposes but also as G-Cars, armed with twin machine guns for heliborne-assault and fire-support purposes.



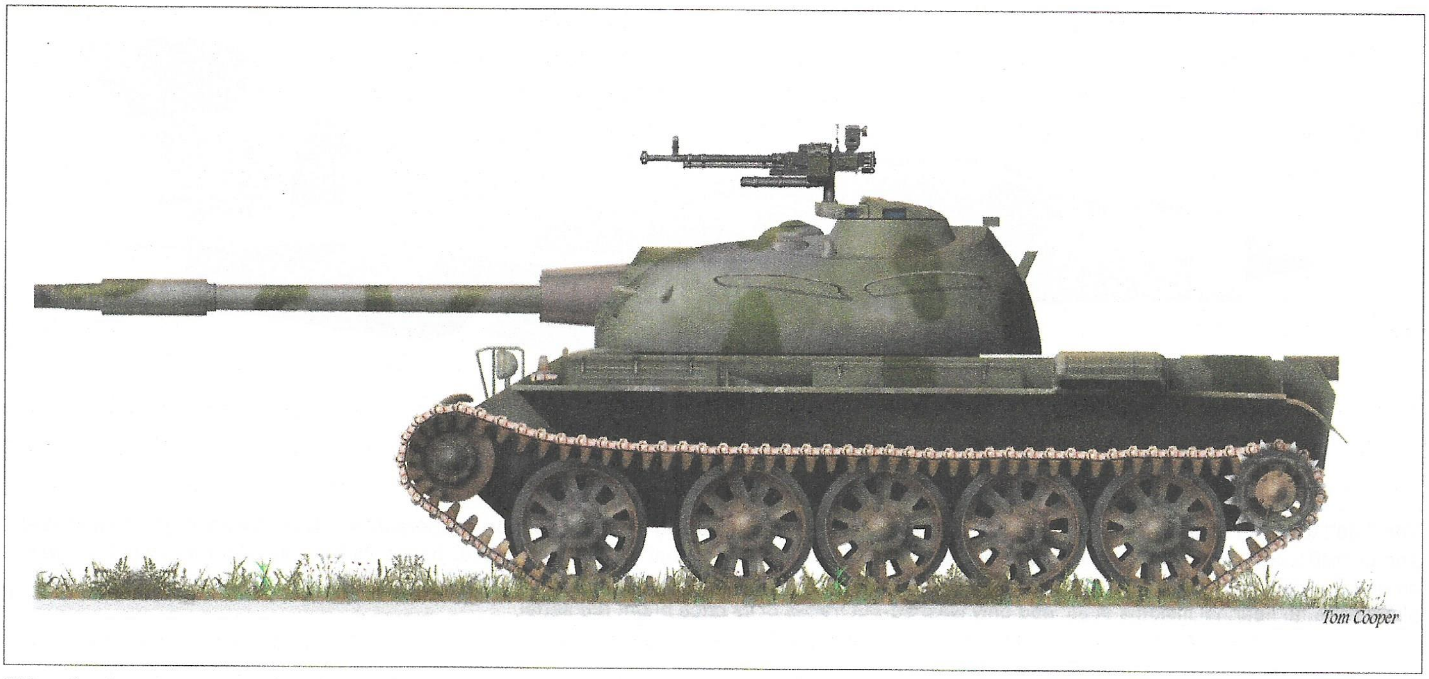
The C382 was one of around a dozen Angolan MiG-21bis deployed at Cabinda airport in support of operations in Bas-Congo in late August 1998. The aircraft was redeployed to Kitona AFB, but reportedly flew only one combat sortie over the DRC before its Russian pilot was forced to make an emergency landing at Tembo in northern Angola, where the MiG was subsequently abandoned. Typically for FANA's MiGs of the 1990s, the plane wore no national insignia at all, and only washed-out traces of its once bright red serial.



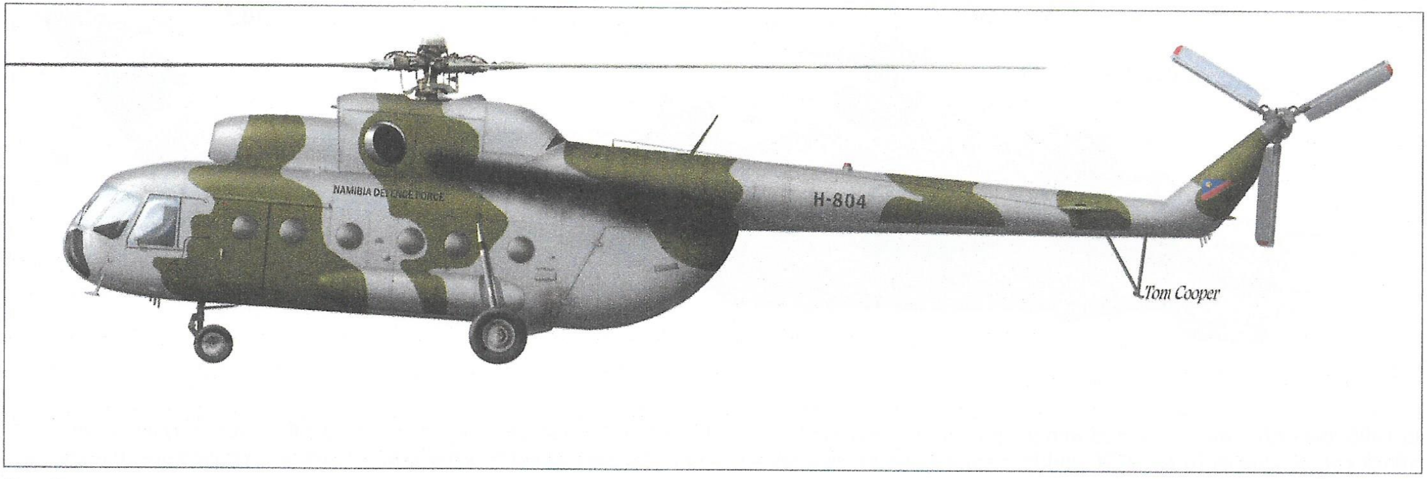
In 1998, the FANA was reinforced with the purchase of several Mi-35Ps painted in this fashion. They reportedly did fly reasonably intensive attack sorties against RPA, UPDF and former FAZ and AFDL troops in the Matadi area. Notable is the exhaust diffuser installed over the engine exhausts and the chaff and flare dispenser on the rear cabin.



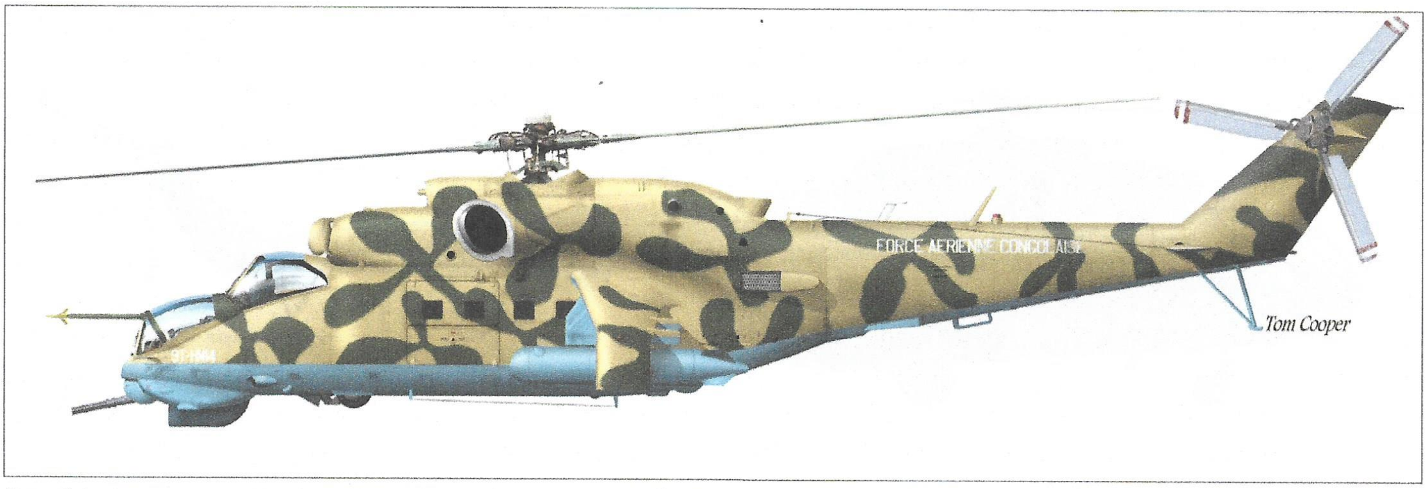
For most of the 1990s, Angolan Mi-8 and Mi-17 helicopters wore no standardized camouflage pattern (indeed, some went into action still wearing their original Aeroflot livery), but during 1998 the FANA introduced this one, showing dark green overall, with the cabin bottom in light blue. Contrary to most other Angolan combat aircraft and helicopters of that period, this Mi-8MTV-1 received a small national insignia, in the form of the Angolan national flag, applied directly behind the cockpit.



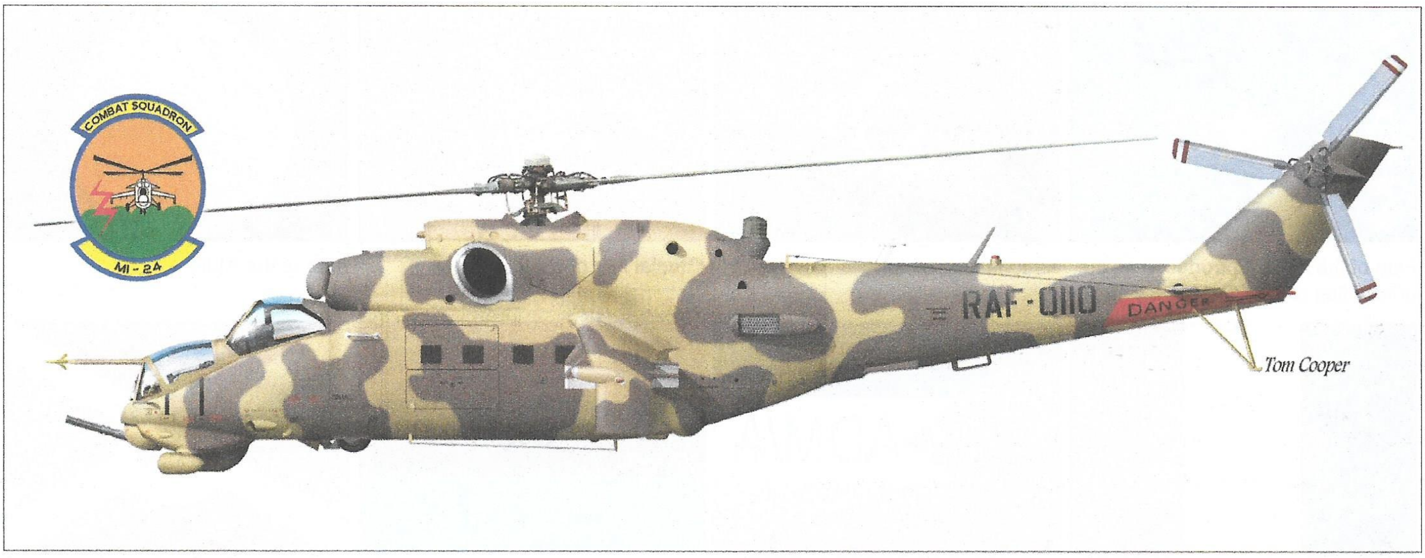
Either the RPA or the ANC captured a number of Type-62 light tanks from FAC stocks and pressed these into combat. Whether to make them slightly more distinguishable from tanks of the same type deployed by the FAC, or in order to refresh their camouflage pattern, these tanks received additional splotches of dark green before being sent into combat.



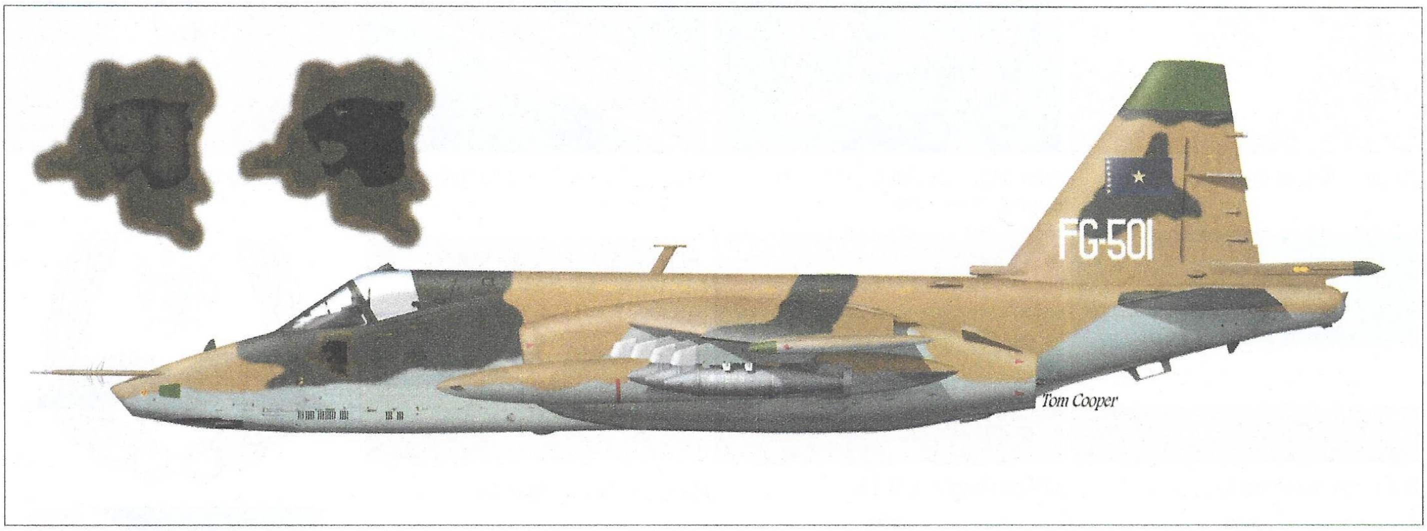
The Namibian Defence Force deployed both its Mi-8Ms in support of its troops in the DRC, but these were almost exclusively used for transport and liaison purposes. Painted light grey and green overall, they wore small serials on the boom and the fin flash.



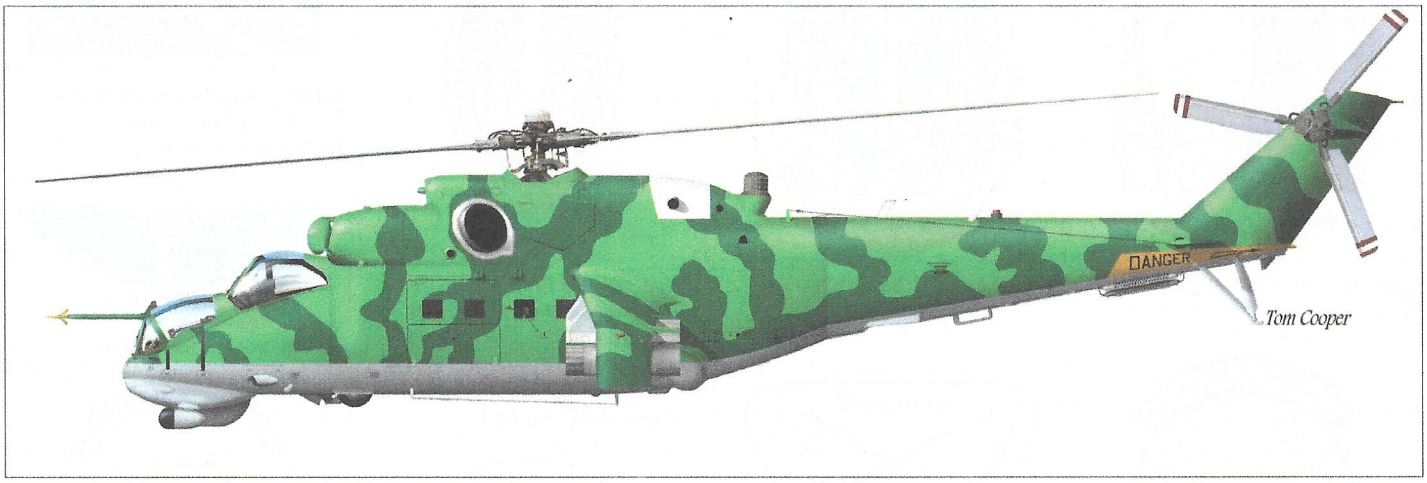
One of the least-known Congolese Mi-24s was this example, serialled 9T-HM14, purchased in 2000 from an unknown source. Due to the lack of qualified Congolese crews, and the withdrawal of South African PMCs, during the Second Congo War this machine was almost continuously maintained and flown by crews of No. 8 Squadron AFZ.



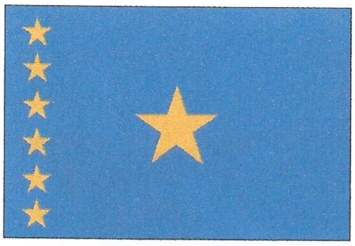
The RPA/AW acquired at least six, probably up to eight, Mi-24s and deployed them in combat during various phases of the Second Congo War, albeit nowhere near the areas where the AFZ Hawks were operating. Considering the general colours of the Rwandan and Congolese landscape, all the RPA's Mi-24s were painted in this rather unexpected pattern, beige and dark earth. The insert shows the crest of the Combat Squadron RPA/AW, which remains the only unit deploying this type in Rwanda.



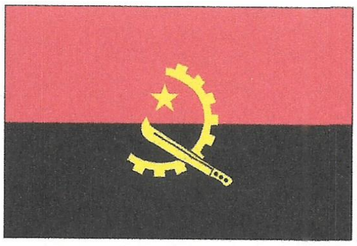
The four Su-25s purchased by the DRC from Georgia were all delivered painted in sand and dark olive green on the upper surfaces, and Russian light blue on the lower surfaces. They all received large serials and fin flashes. The insert shows two different attempts to reconstruct the unit insignia applied on either side of the front fuselage. One shows a lion's head turned to the left and the other a black panther or puma.



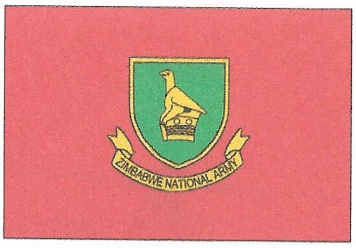
One of the first two Ugandan Mi-24s, belonging to the P-variant, purchased from Belarus and delivered in inoperable condition. It was overhauled and painted in this unusual camouflage pattern before entering service in 1999. This helicopter wears no national insignia but its official serial is believed to be AF801. It is illustrated as usually deployed inside the DRC, in 2000 and 2001, armed with B-8M pods for 80mm unguided rockets with a machine gun installed to fire outside the third window on the left side of the cabin.



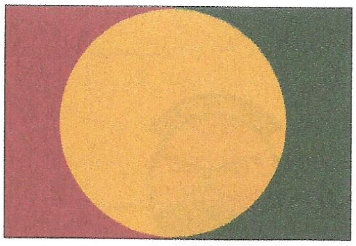
Flag of the AFDL, introduced as the official flag of the DRC in May 1997



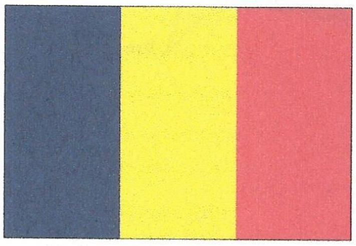
National flag of Angola


ZIMBABWE NATIONAL ARMY

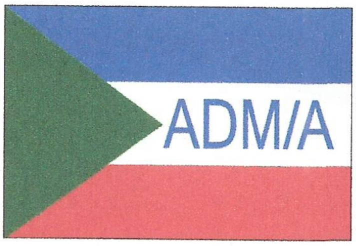
Official flag of the Zimbabwean National Army



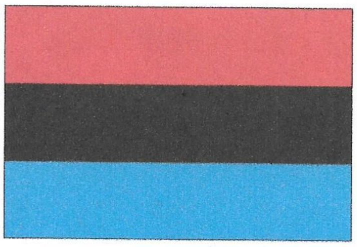
Flag of the ALiR



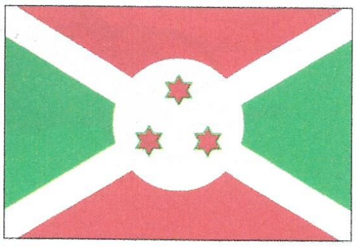
National flag of Chad



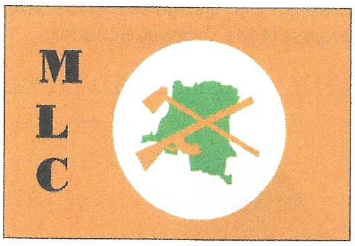
Official flag of the ADM



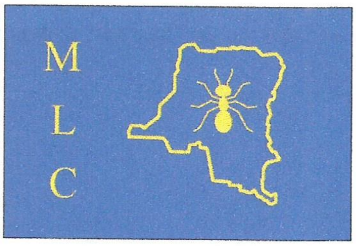
Official flag of the LRA



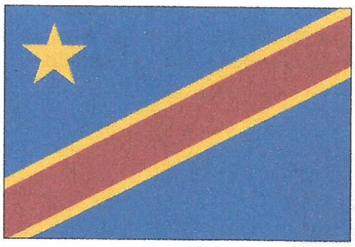
National flag of Burundi



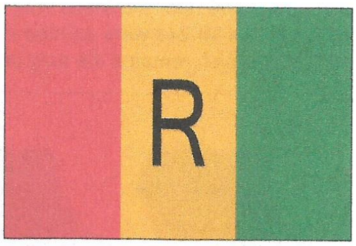
Original flag of the MLC



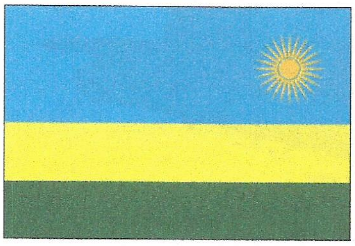
New flag of the MLC, introduced during 1999/2000.



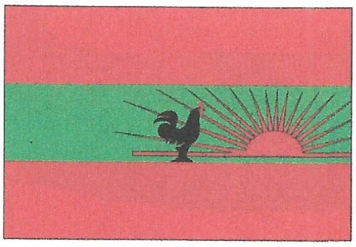
Flag of the RCD and its military wing, the ANC



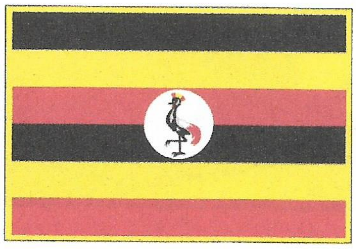
National flag of Rwanda, 1962–2001



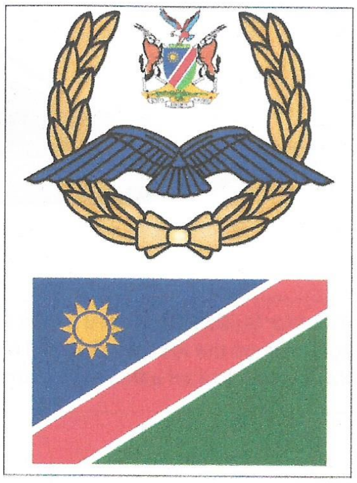
Rwandan national flag from 2002



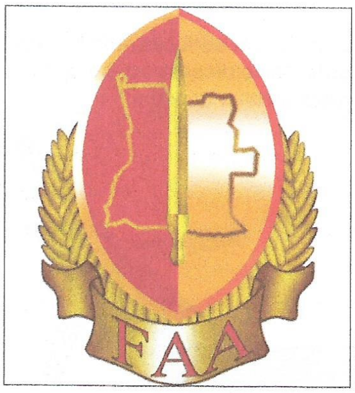
Official flag of UNITA



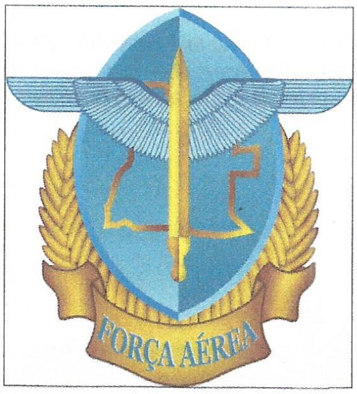
National flag of Uganda



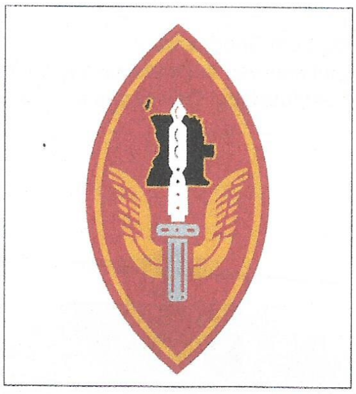
National flag of Namibia with the roundel applied on Namibian military aircraft (above)



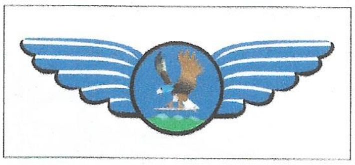
Official crest of the Angolan National Army


FORÇA AÉREA

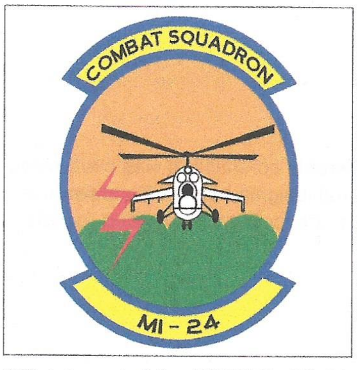
Official crest of the FANA



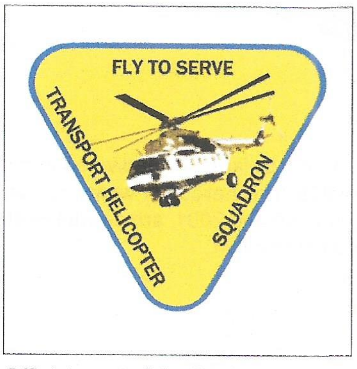
Official crest of the *Brigade de Commandos* – the FAA's crack commando outfit based in Cabo Ledo, which was deployed inside the DRC on several occasions between 1998 and 2001



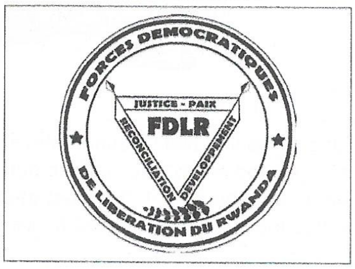
Official crest of the RDF/AF


COMBAT SQUADRON
MI - 24

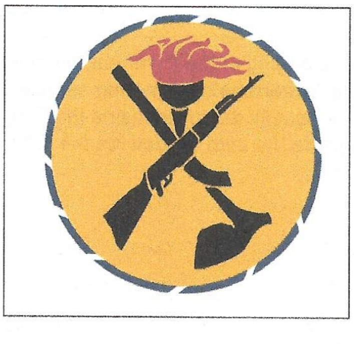
Official crest of the RDF/AF's Mi-24 Squadron


FLY TO SERVE
TRANSPORT HELICOPTER SQUADRON

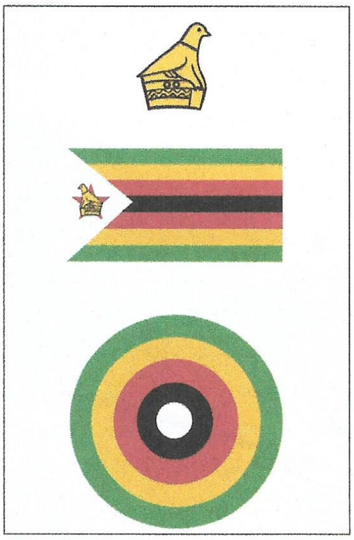
Official crest of the RDF/AF Mi-17 Squadron


FORCES DEMOCRATIQUES DE LIBERATION DU RWANDA
JUSTICE - PAIX
FDLR
RECONCILIATION
DEVELOPPEMENT

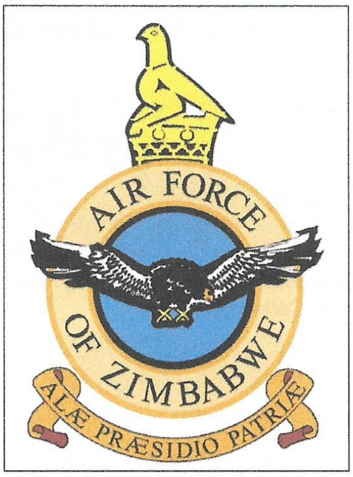
Official crest of the FDLR



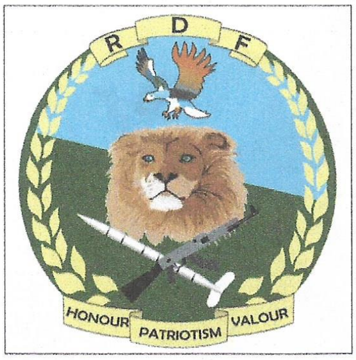
Official crest of Chadian President Deby's political party, used as shoulder patches by ANT officers



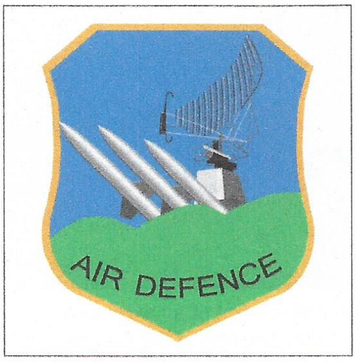
National flag of Zimbabwe, with the roundel and fin flash applied on Zimbabwean military aircraft


AIR FORCE
OF ZIMBABWE
ALÆ PRÆSIDIO PATRIÆ

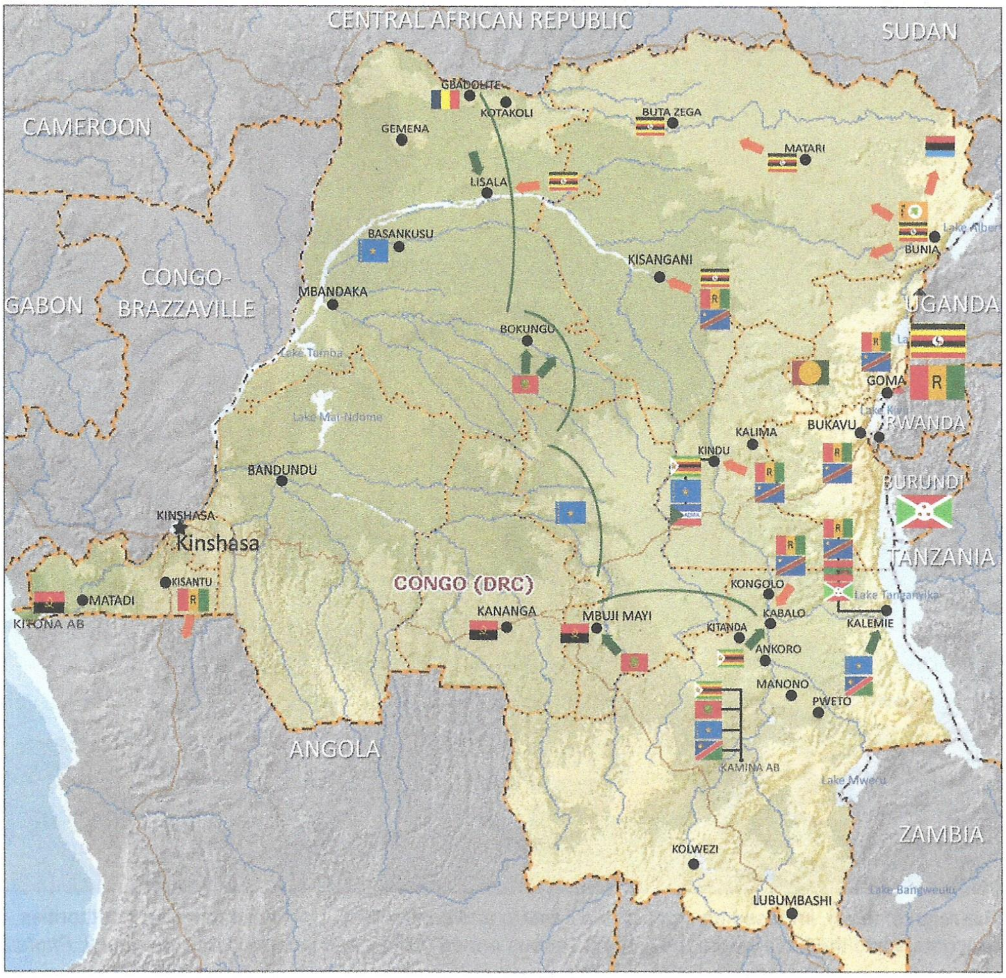
Official crest of the Air Force of Zimbabwe


R D F
HONOUR
PATRIOTISM
VALOUR

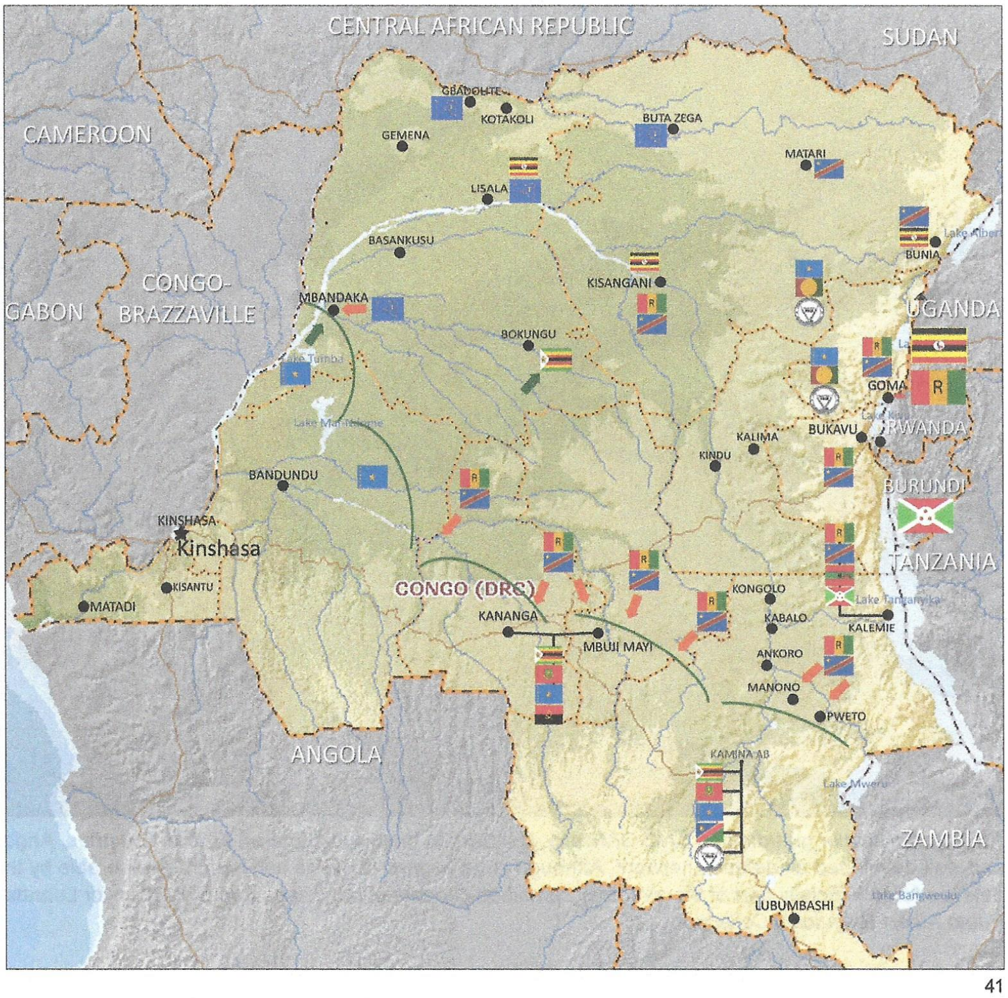
Official crest of the Rwanda Defence Forces – formerly the Rwanda Patriotic Army


AIR DEFENCE

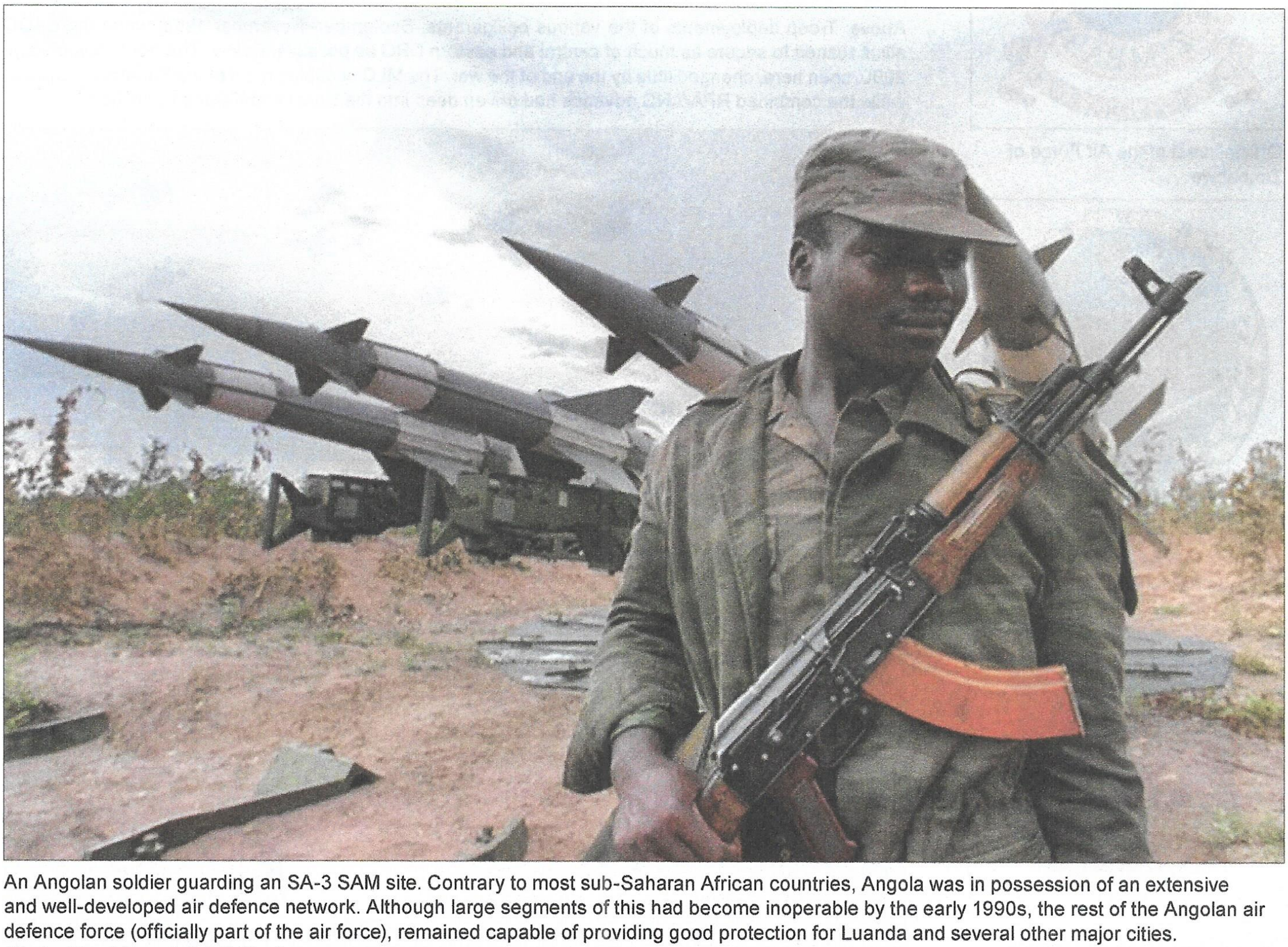
Official crest of the Air Defence Regiment RPA/AW


CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SUDAN
CAMEROON
GBADOLITE
KOTAKOLI
GEMENA
BUTA ZEGA
MATARI
LISALA
BASANKUSU
Lake Albert
BUNIA
KISANGANI
CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE
GABON
MBANDAKA
UGANDA
BOKUNGU
Lake Tumba
GOMA
Lake Mai-Ndome
KALIMA
BUKAVU
RWANDA
KINDU
BANDUNDU
BURUNDI
KINSHASA
Kinshasa
TANZANIA
KISANTU
MATADI
KITONA AB
CONGO (DRC)
KONGOLO
Lake Tanganyika
KANANGA
MBUJI MAYI
KABALO
KALEMIE
KITANDA
ANKORO
MANONO
PWETO
ANGOLA
KAMINA AB
Lake Mweru
ZAMBIA
KOLWEZI
Lake Bangweulu
LUBUMBASHI

Above: Troop deployments of the various belligerents, September–November 1998, when the SADC allies rushed to secure as much of central and eastern DRC as possible. Below: The front lines of early 2000, seen here, changed little by the end of the war. The MLC occupied most of the Equateur Province, while the combined RPA/ANC advance had driven deep into the Kasai and Katanga provinces.


CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SUDAN
CAMEROON
GBADOLITE
KOTAKOLI
GEMENA
BUTA ZEGA
MATARI
LISALA
BASANKUSU
Lake Albert
BUNIA
KISANGANI
CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE
GABON
MBANDAKA
UGANDA
BOKUNGU
Lake Tumba
GOMA
Lake Mai-Ndome
KALIMA
BUKAVU
RWANDA
KINDU
BANDUNDU
BURUNDI
KINSHASA
Kinshasa
TANZANIA
KISANTU
MATADI
CONGO (DRC)
KONGOLO
Lake Tanganyika
KANANGA
KABALO
KALEMIE
MBUJI MAYI
ANKORO
MANONO
PWETO
ANGOLA
KAMINA AB
Lake Mweru
ZAMBIA
Lake Bangweulu
LUBUMBASHI

The reign of terror, imposed on much of the eastern and central DRC by Rwandan military authorities, drove thousands of disaffected Congolese youngsters into the bush where they joined various armed militias and launched an insurgency. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



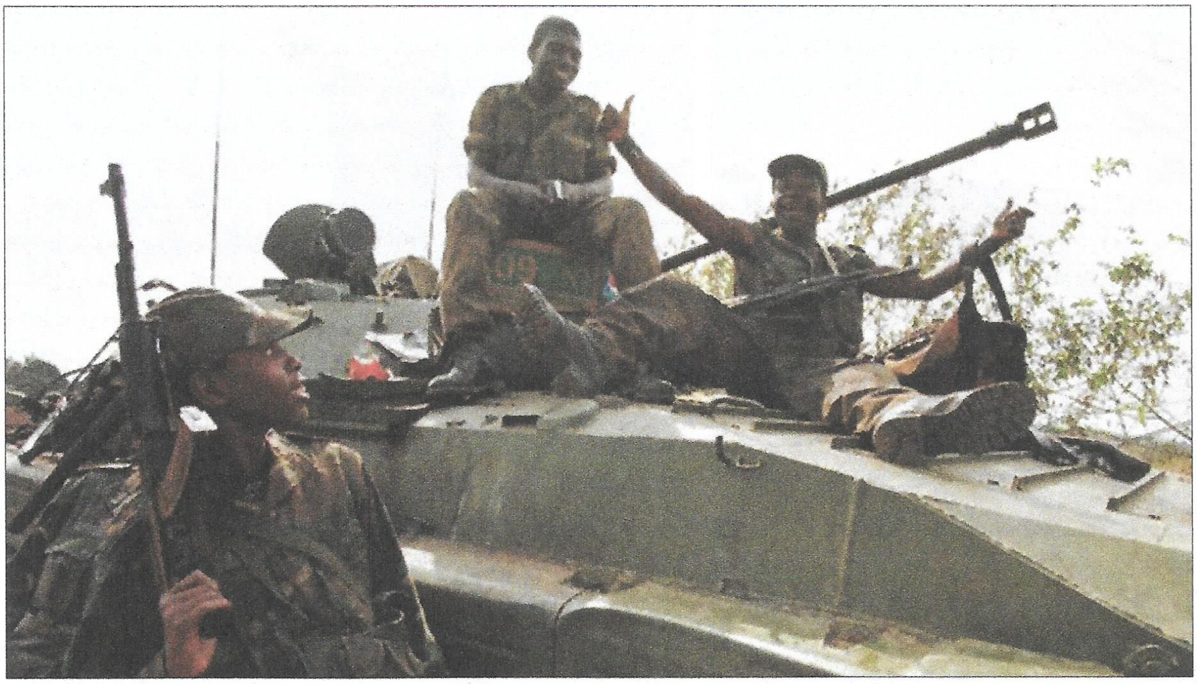
An Angolan soldier guarding an SA-3 SAM site. Contrary to most sub-Saharan African countries, Angola was in possession of an extensive and well-developed air defence network. Although large segments of this had become inoperable by the early 1990s, the rest of the Angolan air defence force (officially part of the air force), remained capable of providing good protection for Luanda and several other major cities. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

Much underestimated at the start of the Second Congo War and known for their unconventional style, even once they were issued uniforms left behind by the former FAZ, through their cooperation with the ALiR and FDD and with help of material support from the government in Kinshasa the Mayi-Mayi militias developed into a potent military force that played a crucial role on the battlefields of the eastern Congo – especially during the closing stages of this conflict. *Photo Jerome Delay*

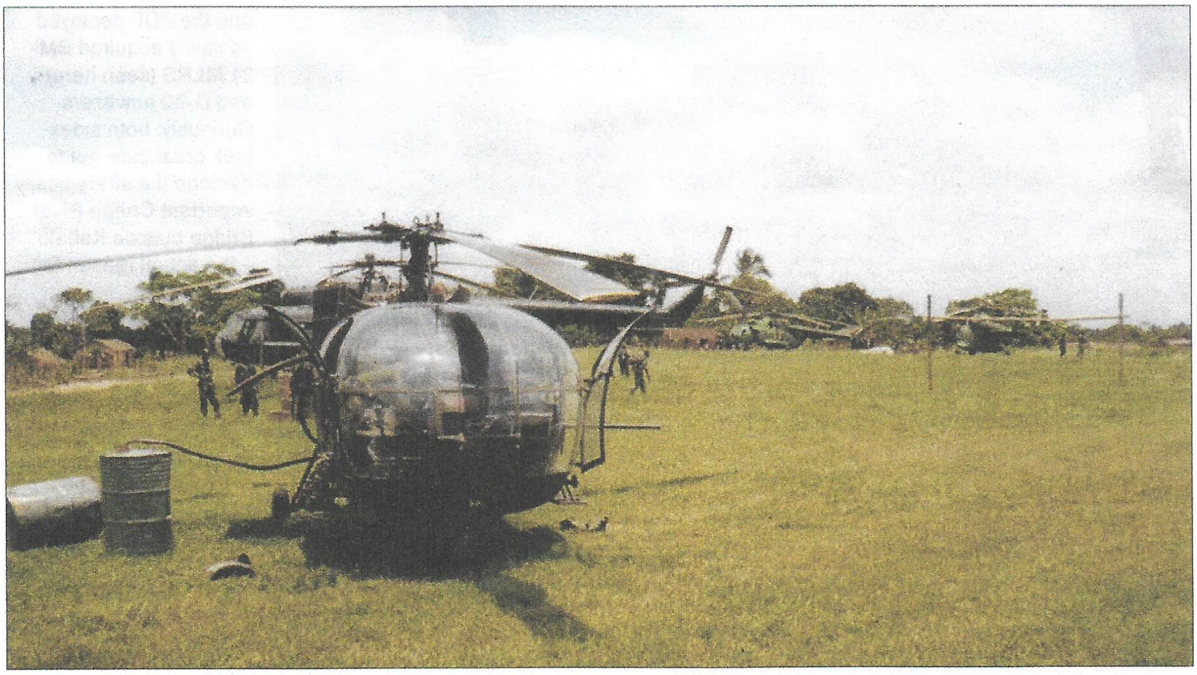
A group of Rwandan NCOs undergoing training at the Infantry Academy in Gako. This US-constructed facility became a major RPA training grounds. According to the Pentagon, not only 2,000 former FAR officers and other ranks, but also over 10,000 other Rwandan soldiers underwent training there between 1995 and 2010. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

During the course of the advance from Kamina to Kinshasa, Kabarebe's force stole many civilian cars in order to bolster its transport capacity. The preferred vehicle was the Toyota Land Cruiser, but anything with four wheels and an engine would do. *Photo James Akena*

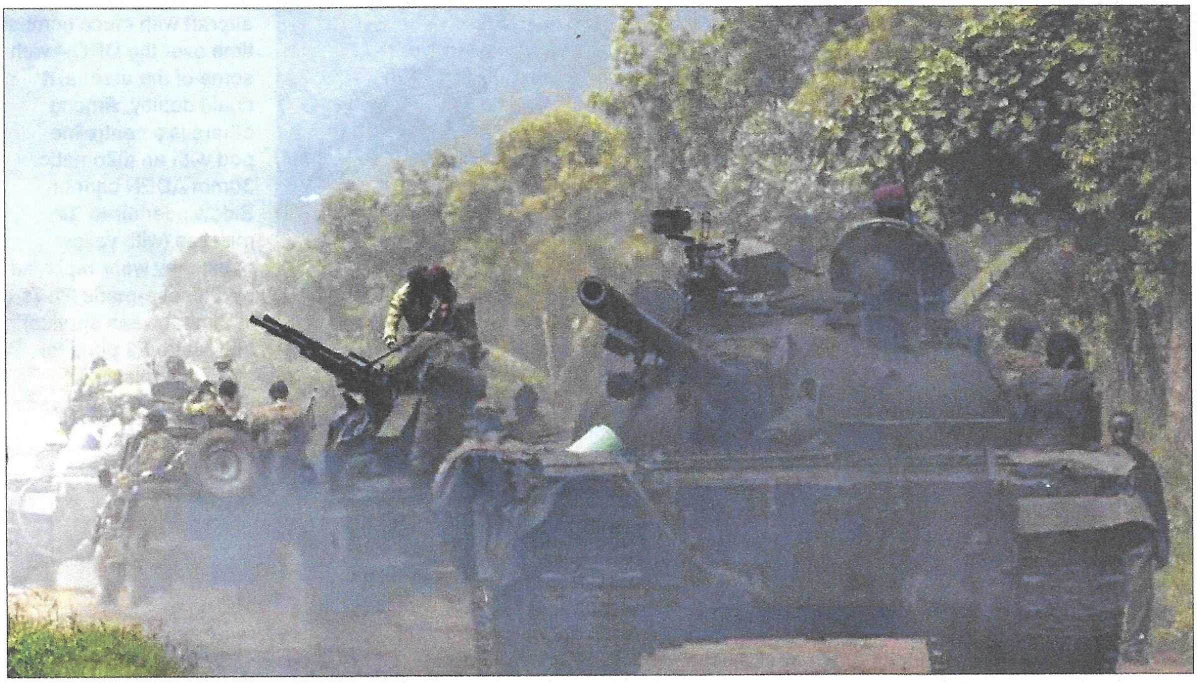
The RPA heavily utilized its new Mi-171s to support its rapid advance into the Kivus in August/September 1998. This helicopter (serial RAF-0407) is in the process of unloading ammunition and equipment in the field. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*



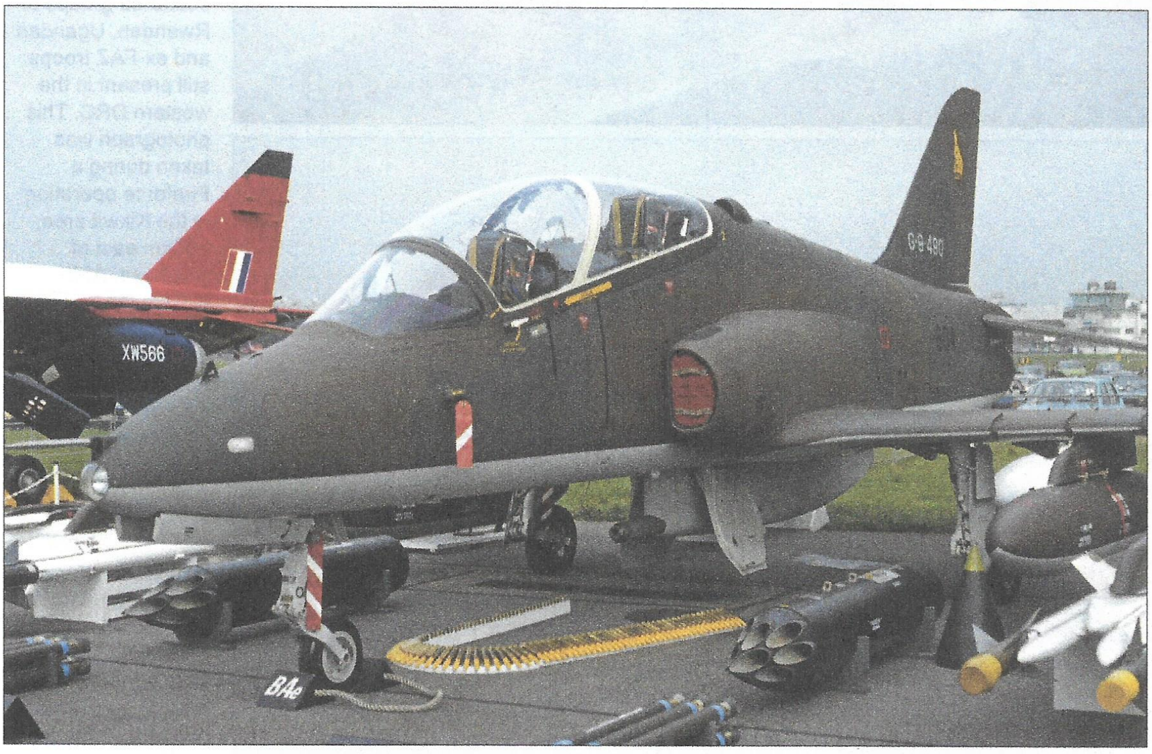
Top: Jubilant Angolan troops with a BMP-2 IFV outside Matadi in late August 1998. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



Centre: Due to severe pressure from Washington, it was only during September 1998 that the Angolans and Zimbabweans launched several mopping-up operations south of Mbanza-Ngungu, with the aim of neutralizing scattered groups of Rwandan, Ugandan and ex-FAZ troops still present in the western DRC. This photograph was taken during a Fireforce operation in the Kikwit area, 500km east of Kinshasa. AFZ K-Cars (foreground) acted as airborne command posts and provided fire support, while the FANA's Mi-17s inserted Angolan commandos. *Photo ZDF*



Bottom: A column of FAC Type-59 MBTs and 'technicals' (including one with ZU-23 flak) navigating a dirt road. Much of the fighting in the Equateur Province occurred along the relatively good road networks available in this part of the DRC. *Photo James Akena*

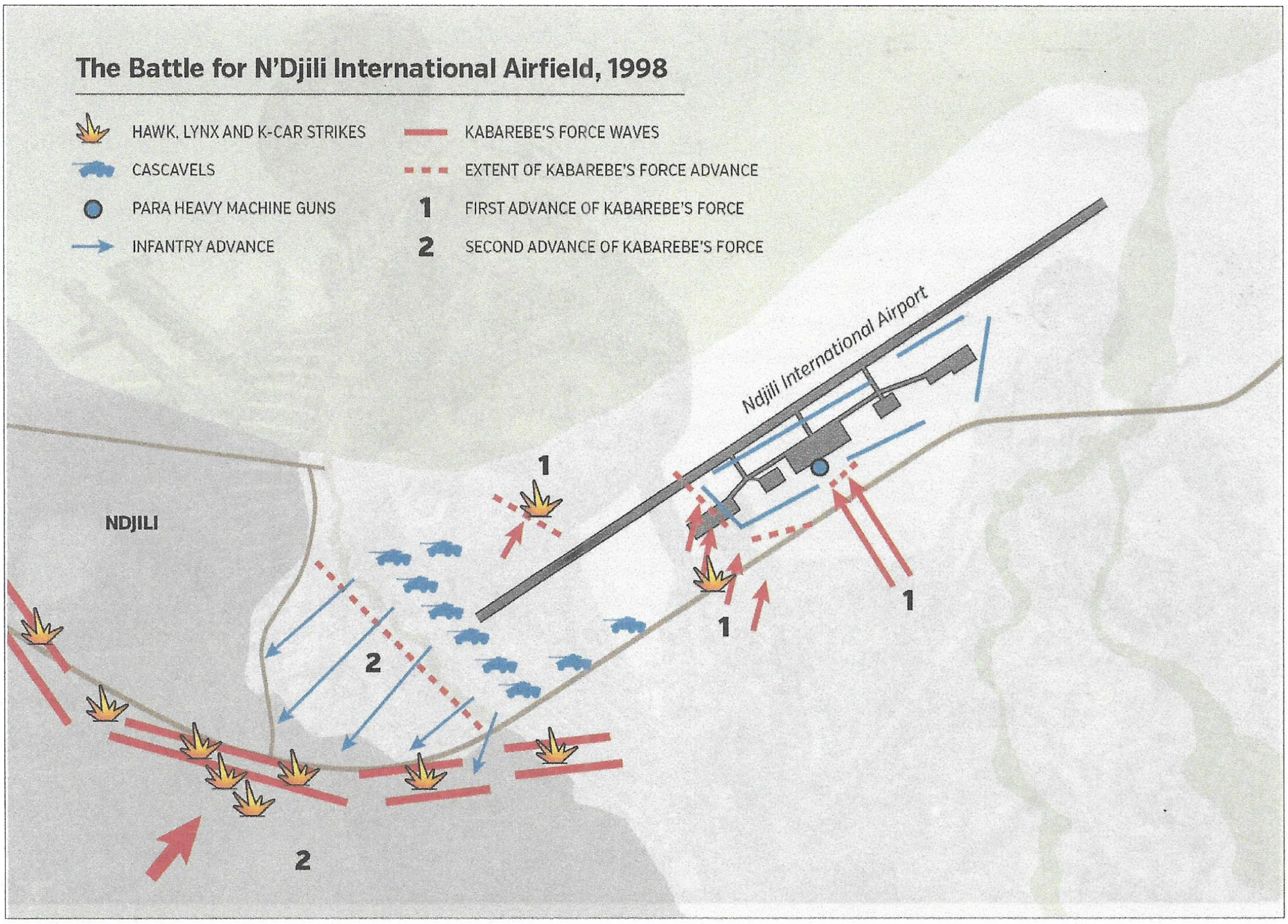


Above left: After failing to capture Kabalo, the AFZ flew hundreds of air strikes against the town and the adjacent airfield, and the ZDF deployed its newly acquired BM-21 MLRS (seen here) and D-30 howitzers. Curiously, both sides took great care not to damage the strategically important Congo River Bridge outside Kabalo – the actual reason for fighting here. *Photo via Tom Cooper*

Above right: UNITA MANPAD team equipped with SA-7 shoulder-launched missiles, as deployed during the early stages of the First Congo War. *Photo Tom Cooper Collection*

Centre: A pre-delivery photograph of the Hawk Mk 60 604 – the AFZ aircraft with much combat time over the DRC – with some of the arsenal it could deploy. Among others is a centreline pod with an automatic 30mm ADEN cannon, Sidewinder air-to-air missiles (with yellow caps; they were replaced by Chinese-made PL-7s in Zimbabwean service), and Matra F2 pods for unguided missiles. *Photo Fergal Goodmann*

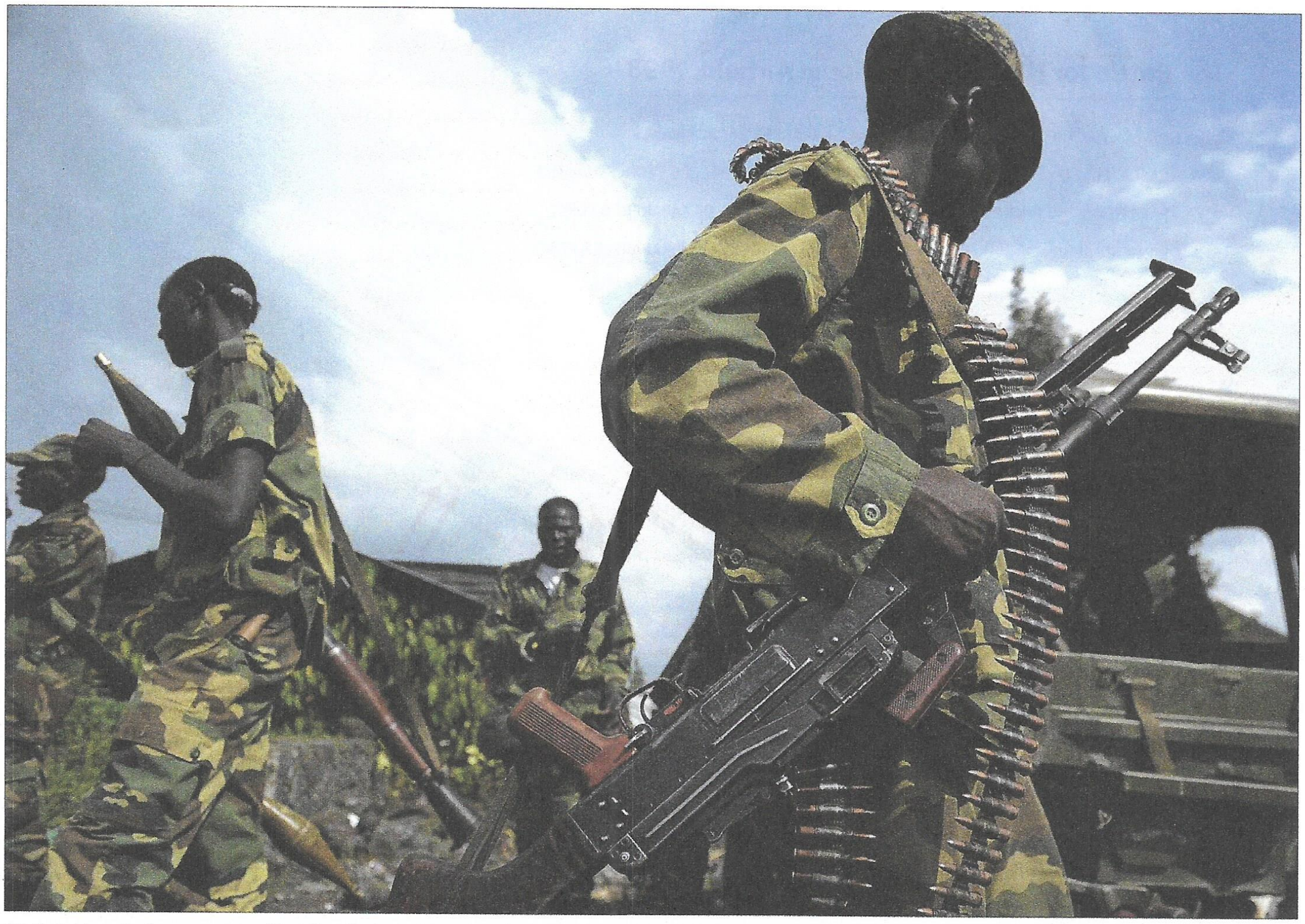
Except for purchasing MBTs, APCs and artillery, the government in Kinshasa also reinforced its navy with the acquisition of over 200 gunboats and fast patrol craft in late 1998. They proved crucial for supporting operations along many Congolese rivers. This example was photographed after the war. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*


The Battle for N'Djili International Airfield, 1998

HAWK, LYNX AND K-CAR STRIKES
CASCAVELS
PARA HEAVY MACHINE GUNS
INFANTRY ADVANCE
KABAREBE'S FORCE WAVES
EXTENT OF KABAREBE'S FORCE ADVANCE
1 FIRST ADVANCE OF KABAREBE'S FORCE
2 SECOND ADVANCE OF KABAREBE'S FORCE
Ndjili International Airport
NDJILI
1
1
1
2
2

In mid-1999, the government in Kinshasa intensified cooperation with various Mayi-Mayi militias, providing them with arms and equipment. This Mayi-Mayi fighter was photographed (shortly after receiving his pay from Kinshasa) wearing ex-FAZ uniform and an FAC cap and beret. *Photo Jerome Delay*

An FAC BTR-60 APC with a squad of Congolese troops deployed during the battle of Pweto in October 2000. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



MLC fighters in the process of loading their weapons and ammunition on a Toyota Land Cruiser used for troop transport. This well-trained and disciplined force brought the FAC units in the Equateur Province to the brink of defeat in late 2000. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

Weak central government, endemic corruption and an idle command structure resulted in the poor performance of the Congolese military – renamed the Armed Forces of the DRC (*Forces Armées du République Congolaise*, FARDC) in 2002 – fighting against various rebel movements which had emerged after the Second Congo War, especially in the eastern parts of the country This FARDC T-55 fires on M23 rebels in the North Kivu in 2012. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection* agreed to distribute the Congolese airspace between them. The AFZ was to operate only north of the Kitona–Songolo line, and the Angolans only south of it, i.e. along their border.

7. For all the above-mentioned reasons, a decision was taken not to pursue the remnants of Kabarebe's force.

Nevertheless, the AFZ continued flying reconnaissance, primarily with the intention of tracking the withdrawing enemy. It was under such circumstances that it suffered its first loss of this war when, on 4 September 1998, a Congolese SF 260 flown by Squadron Leader Sharunga crashed in bad weather while searching for the rearguard of Kabarebe's force between Celo and Mbanza-Ngungu. His body and the wreckage of his aircraft were picked up by a team of AFZ technicians led by Group Captain Chingono, a day later.

Eventually, the Ugandans at Inga Dam were left to scatter into the jungle, and the dam was retaken only once the majority of them had vanished. Without Rwandan leadership and support, the majority of the ex-FAZ and ex-AFDL rebels either scattered or changed sides, again. The remnants of Kabarebe's force were left to withdraw toward Quimbele in northern Angola, where they were safe from the AFZ and where the MPLA government remained more concerned about UNITA than the Rwandans. Once there, Kabarebe's force sided with Angolan insurgents and captured Maquela do Zombo, together with the local airfield. Hoping to receive reinforcements and supplies, they began construction work on the runway, extending it from 1,400 to 1,800 metres, to enable landings of large transport aircraft. However, except for ammunition and food, no reinforcements were sent from Kigali. Instead, from mid-December, the surviving 3,000 RPA and UPDF troops were extracted in some 30 flights of Victor Bout's aircraft – all undertaken by night in order to avoid interception by Angolan and Zimbabwean fighter jets. The AFZ learned about this evacuation, but could do little to stop it. Without a useful radar network, it was next to impossible to find and intercept any of the involved transports by night. The last Rwandan/Ugandan troops arrived back in Kigali on 24 December 1998.

CHAPTER FIVE:
OPERATION MUSAKO, BANYAMULENGE MUTINY

After the failure of the Rwandan master plan for toppling Kabila, the attention of Rwandan military leaders returned to eastern Congo, and the Kivus in particular. There the situation of the FAC units loyal to Kabila was downright hopeless, as the RPA's Operation Musako, based on the mutiny of Banyamulenge elements within the FAC, developed almost flawlessly. Nearly all the troops assigned to 10 Commando Brigade in Goma sided with Mbuki, and they found themselves rapidly reinforced by the 75th Battalion RPA, which followed on the heels of Kabarebe's force when it captured Goma. Only 38 officers and 100 men of 12 Brigade FAC fought back. Without much success – the mutineers were rapidly reinforced by a battalion of RPA troops – the loyalists were compelled to surrender. Thye were brought to the Kavumu airport, north of Bukavu, and forced to lie down on the airport runway. RPA then officers ordered the captured *kadogo* to execute all their officers and NCOs.

The Rwandans and mutineers faced less resistance in Uvira. The FAC battalion recently deployed there attempted to escape from its base, but clashed with mutineers reinforced by another RPA battalion and suffered heavy losses. The mutineers and RPA troops were thus free to arbitrarily arrest, torture and execute a number of loyal officers, traditional leaders and administrative officials – the latter usually on the basis of having dared to criticize them. Hardly any of those arrested was ever seen again.

Thus, with the help of FAC mutineers at least five Rwandan battalions – all under the command of 211 Brigade – crossed the border and rapidly brought all the towns in North and South Kivu under their control, enabling Kigali to set the political scene. It was under these circumstances that the Rwandans brought together various Congolese opponents and left them to officially announce the establishment of the RCD – and its military wing, the ANC – on 16 August 1998.

After securing the zone along the border with Rwanda, the RPA continued Operation Musako by advancing farther west, practically repeating their manoeuvres from November/December 1996, and prompting some observers to enter bets on how long it might take for them to reach Kinshasa this time. By 13 August, the Rwandans had taken Shabunda, some 100km west of Bukavu, before continuing toward Kisangani and Kindu. The reason for the early success of this offensive was that the RPA could not only deploy increased numbers and better-equipped troops than in 1996, but also because it was supported by sections of the FAC and were better informed of the situation ahead of them. Thus, the Rwandans were able to make use of an improved variant of their usual tactics: a weak spearhead would infiltrate and then attack the objective in a bold and mostly swift move, then the main force would follow to mop up and secure the conquered area.

However, contrary to 1996, an entirely new situation was developing to the rear of the advancing Rwandans and RCD combatants. Namely, while they encountered few problems in securing major urban centres, they lacked sufficient forces to bring the vast rural areas under their effective control and so most of the countryside and the road networks soon came under the effective control of various Mayi-Mayi groups, most of which had been cooperating with the ALiR and FDD since mid-1997. Frustrated by the activity of their former and more recent enemies, whenever finding themselves on the receiving end of attacks launched by these three groups, the Rwandans hit back with increased brutality. For example, after the Mayi-Mayi ambushed an RPA column on the road between Bukavu and Kindu, killing around 20 Rwandan and Banyamulenge troops on 23 August 1998, the RPA entered the villages of Kilungutwe, Kalama and Kasika, pillaged them, set the houses on fire and massacred over 1,000 civilians, including women and children. Such search-and-destroy operations became a norm for the next three years of the Second Congo War, which would soon see the involvement of the Burundian military as well.

Outside the Kivus atrocities were the order of the day too, but most of these were instigated by the FAC and targeted the Banyamulenge. In Kalemie, in the northeastern part of the Katanga Province, the district commissioner for Tanganyika called on the population to join

Zimbabwean pilots and ground crews found it relatively simple to overhaul and return to serviceable condition a number of Congolese SF 260s as the AFZ was flying the same type on pilot training. Here is one example, operated by No. 6 Squadron. *Photo Tom Cooper Collection*

Bad weather forced one Russian-contracted FAA pilot to land his MiG-21bis at the dirt strip in Tembo in northern Angola, in late August or early September 1998. After suffering significant damage during the rough landing, the plane was sabotaged through the activation of the ejection seat and then abandoned. *Photo Angelo Matari*

the PCD and attack the Tutsis living in the district. Together with the FAC, the PCD detained dozens of civilians and held them prisoner at Camp Marin, close to the local airport. It was in reaction to reports about this development that, on 26 August 1998, the RPA launched an airborne assault on Kalemie. They attacked using a total of eight transport aircraft chartered from Victor Bout's Air Cess Rwanda, which were to land and disgorge an entire battalion of RPA infantry.* The FAC initially fought back, shooting at the first Il-18 to land and causing some losses. However, the Rwandans overcame the shock and then charged, dispersing the Congolese in the process.

Farther south, around 2,000 Tutsis were detained by the FAC in Vyura. Led by Chief Kabugora, some 300 of them managed to escape and arm themselves with spears and knives. They launched a counterattack on the FAC but this resulted in a massacre, in which around 70 people were killed. The RPA battalion that secured Kalemie reached this area on 15 September 1998, securing Vyura and then evacuated the surviving 8,000–10,000 Tutsis in a northerly direction.

The situation was slightly different in Kisangani, where a sizeable group of RPA troops refused to be flown out to Kigali on 28 July. Instead, they remained at the Bangoka airport, camping next to a group of ex-FAZ troops who were waiting to be sent to Kamina for retraining. When the news of the mutiny in Goma spread, fighting between these two groups broke out, as most of the ex-FAZ troops sided with FAC loyalists. Together, they managed to secure not only Bangoka, but also Kisangani, in turn preventing the RPA from landing reinforcements as had been done in Kitona and Kalemie. However, the Congolese soldiers subsequently showed more interest in rounding up Tutsis and people of Rwandan origin, arresting and torturing them, and burying several dozen of their victims at the Kisangani Simisini airport, than in preparing and maintaining their defensive positions.

At Kamina AFB in southwestern Katanga, which was used as a major FAC training camp, the FAC loyalists rounded up several hundred young Tutsis and disarmed them. All were summarily executed on 5 August. Similar scenes occurred in Lubumbashi, Kipushi, Likasi and Kolwezi, where hundreds of Tutsis, people of Rwandan origin and any civilians who resembled them were arbitrarily arrested, tortured, with dozens of them executed.

Zimbabwean advance

After signing the treaty with the DRC, the ZDF originally planned to deploy only a small contingent of its troops per aircraft to Kinshasa. Most Zimbabwean units were to reach the Congo via the only good road in that part of Africa, from Harare to Lusaka in Zambia (with the official approval of that country), via Kabwe and Chingola, to Lubumbashi in southern Katanga.† Convoys of the first of four ZDF battalions scheduled to advance along this route started on 10 August 1998.

The unit reached Lubumbashi on 15 August and left a small communication and military police detachment at the local airport (this was soon reinforced by the first contingent of Namibian troops flown in on Angolan transport aircraft) and then continued toward Kamina AFB, which subsequently became the centre of the Zimbabwean military deployment in the southern DRC. As soon as Kamina – and its two 2,700m-long runways – was found to be safe, the AFZ deployed two additional Hawks, several Lynxes, Alouettes and AB 412s there. However, and more importantly at least from the standpoint of the Zimbabwean air force, was the discovery of local underground ammunition depots which contained immense stocks of French-made SAMP 250-, 400- and 500kg bombs, British-made 1,000lb (454kg) bombs, Spanish-made BR 250 and BR 500 bombs; Matra F1, F2, F4 and T-116M 68mm rocket pods and French-made 2.75in unguided rockets – all of them compatible with the bomb-lugs of the Hawks and the Lynxes – and 30mm cannon ammunition. Since the FAC were not operating with an air force, they had no need for this armament, meaning that the AFZ did not need to bring in all its ammunition from Zimbabwe. This factor became even more important once the Zimbabweans redeployed most of their aircraft and helicopters from Kinshasa to Kitona AFB.

After securing Kitona and Lubumbashi, the Zimbabwean troops advanced north, toward Manono and Pweto in the east, and on Mbuji-Mayi in the west, where they met an Angolan mechanized brigade, reinforced by Namibian artillery and helicopters. The well-constructed airports in all these towns were swiftly put to use by the AFZ and the NDF (despite some reports to the contrary, the Angolan air force was never deployed in southern or eastern DRC), not only

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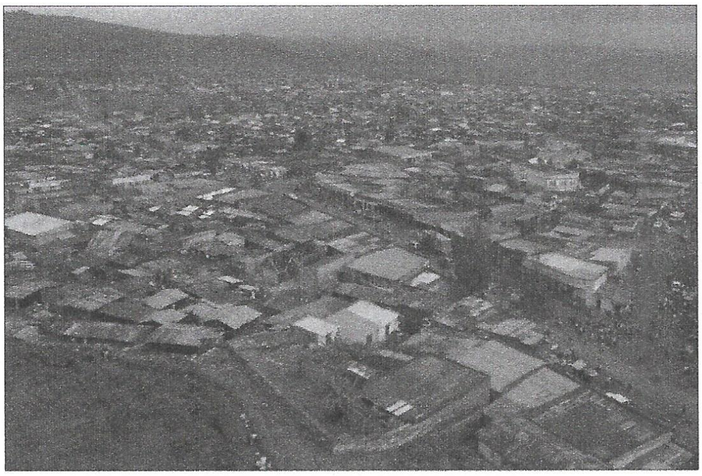
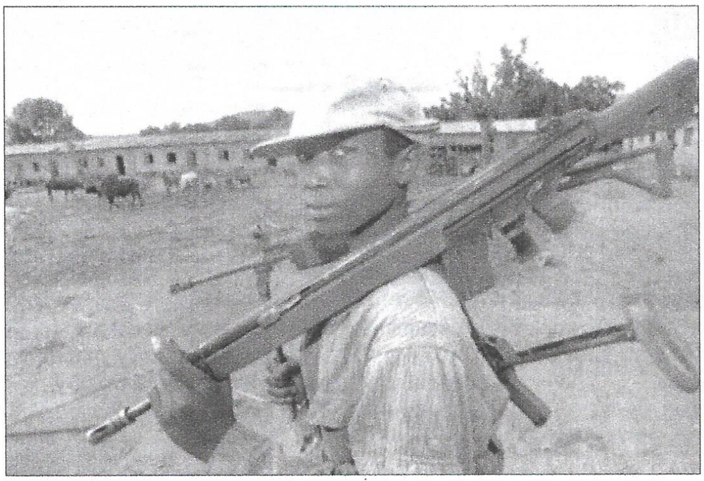
* AP report, 10 October 1998

† This road was to become the main supply artery for the ZDF in the DRC, and was used so heavily between 1998 and 2001, that Zambian citizens began complaining it was owned by the Zimbabweans.



Aerial view of Goma, the town that was the centre of the Banyamulenge mutiny within the FAC, as officially declared by Kigali, and that became the capital of the RCD. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*



Immediately after entering the DRC, RPA troops imposed an unprecedented regime of terror on the local population. This young RPA soldier has several captured assault rifles and light machine guns. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

Lake Kivu, around which countless tragic scenes were taking place during August 1998, as Rwanda launched its second invasion of the Congo. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

for forward-deployed detachments of combat aircraft and helicopters, but also as landing sites for heavy transport aircraft bringing in additional supplies, equipment and troops.

The next phase of the ZDF operations saw its troops advancing from Mbuji-Mayi on Kananga. From there, the Zimbabweans airlifted part of their 5.1 Infantry Battalion to Ikela, in southeastern Equateur Province, 285km southwest of Kisangani, with the intention of reconstructing the local road to serve as a makeshift airstrip that would enable them to reinforce the FAC garrison in the third-largest Congolese city.

In the east, the Zimbabweans advanced from Manono and Pweto on Kongolo and Kagalo, with the intention of continuing toward Kindu, which was still under FAC control. If able to secure these cities, towns and airfields, the ZDF commanders intended to establish a front line – a kind of an Eastern Front – along the Congo River that would rely on a number of fortified airports, from Pepa to Pweto and Manono in the south, via Ankoro, Kitanda, Kabalo, Bokungu and Kindu, to Kisangani and Ikela – where their troops could be supported by air or along the Congo River, and thus halt the Rwandan advance. In late August 1998, Mugabe did not intend fighting a long war, and after the victory in Kinshasa, considering Kabila's position to be safe, he suggested there was no need to continue the war. However, Rwanda, Uganda and the RCD took this as a sign of weakness and strengthened their efforts to continue their advance into central and southern Congo before the ZDF and NDF could help the FAC.

Eventually, the Zimbabwean plan was overtaken by events, especially in Kisangani, where the situation turned desperate before the Zimbabweans could reach the city. Led by the 75th Battalion RPA, an ANC column approached along the road from Lubutu, on 21 August, meeting little resistance. The FAC units, supposed to defend Kisangani, practically disintegrated over the course of the following days and the city fell on 23 August. The Rwandans immediately opened an air bridge to bring in reinforcements and supplies. Around 400 Congolese and other troops – including some 100 ALiR and FDD soldiers – were captured and summarily executed.

The AFZ monitored these developments by sending Hawks on armed reconnaissance over Kisangani and, on 26 August, bombed both the city's airports, with unknown results. Still, their appearance prompted the RCD to claim an Angolan MiG-21 as shot down directly over the city.*

Battle for Kindu

After securing Kisangani, the RPA/ANC rapidly advanced into the Orientale Province, taking control of most of it by mid-September. While rushing reinforcements to Ikela, the ZDF commanders attempted to stem the pace of the enemy advance by intercepting RPA/

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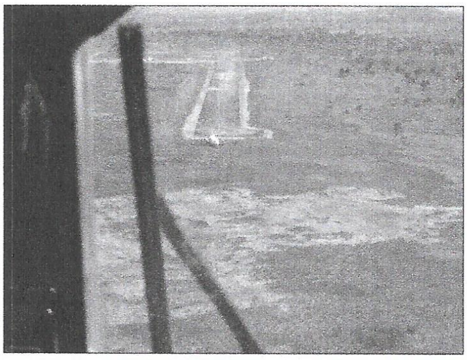
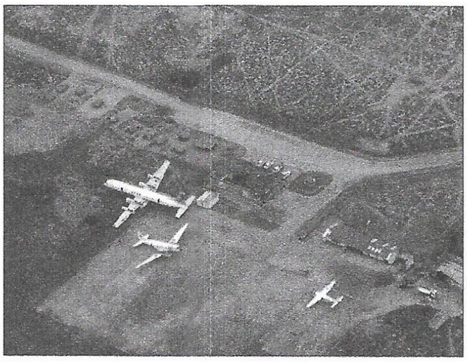
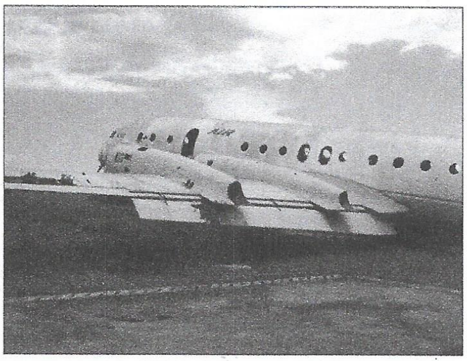
* Different reports in *New Vision* newspaper, Kampala, September and October 1998.



View of the runway at Kalemie airport, as seen from an approaching transport aircraft. Although taken in July 2002 (and showing the An-8 'EL-WVA' that overshot the runway, in the foreground), this photograph shows a similar scene to that which the Air Cess crews and Rwandan commanders experienced when they were assaulting this place on 26 August 1998. *Photo Michel Bonnardeaux*

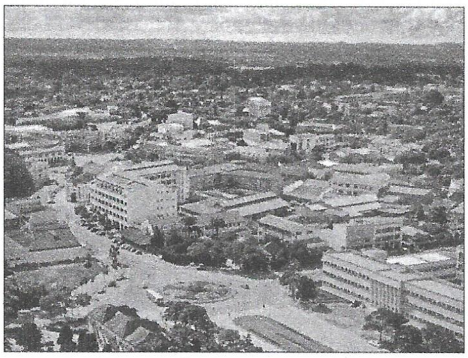


Main ramp of the Kalemie airport with the Air Cess Rwanda Il-18 (large white aircraft) that was shot up by the Congolese during the Rwandan assault on 26 August 1998. *Photo via Guido Potters*



Close up of the Air Cess Rwanda Il-18 knocked out at Kalemie. Essentially owned by Victor Bout, the aircraft was written off while carrying Rwandan Patriotic Army troops that were assaulting Kalemie. *Photo via Guido Potters*

Kamina village, meanwhile a major town, adjacent to the large air and army base of Kamina, as seen in the 1970s. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



Lubumbashi, in the 1960s, capital of the Katanga Province, was strategically important and a major base for Zimbabwean military deployment. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

ANC supply columns. With the help of an SAS team deployed by helicopters deep behind the enemy lines on 11 September 199, two AFZ Hawks hit an ANC column underway near Lubutu with BL755 CBUs, killing up to 45 and injuring 19 troops. Furthermore, behind the advancing Rwandans and mutineers, thousands of civilians were joining the insurgency against the ANC and RPA. The RCD had managed to make itself extremely unpopular in the Maniema Prefecture and by the end of the year this area was infiltrated by several Mayi-Mayi groups. In South Kivu the Mayi-Mayi also battled the Rwandans for control of the coltan mining town of Lulingu, 90km from Shabunda.* In retaliation, over the next 16 months, the Rwandans launched at least 30 punitive expeditions against civilians suspected of collaborating with insurgents, pillaging dozens of villages and murdering thousands of locals in the process.

Meanwhile, the attention of both sides concentrated on Kindu, where loyal FAC troops initially managed to force the mutineers to flee, but were then distracted and began attacking the local Tutsis instead of strengthening their positions around the city. Through late August/early September the Congolese deployed two brigades in Kindu, which were expected to launch a counteroffensive into the Kivus. Commencing on 5 October 1998, this operation collapsed after four days of fighting, during which time a combined force of around 9,000 ANC, RPA and FAB troops thoroughly beat the FAC. Roughly 5,000 survivors retreated into Kindu, closely followed by the enemy. After redeploying from N'Djili IAP to Kitona AFB, Major-General Mike Nyambuya and his staff scrambled to stabilize the situation. Using chartered transports and airliners, they dispatched a company of their troops and around 500 fighters of the Ugandan West Nile Bank Front into the town. Nevertheless, by mid-September, Kindu was practically under siege, encircled from three sides, and reachable only through a southwestern corridor, primarily held open to allow civilians to flee. Within a few days the Rwandans were so close to the local airfield that one Il-76 transport, supporting Congolese allies, was damaged by ground fire while attempting to land.

Worse was to follow on 10 October 1998, when RCD troops under the command of Arthur Mulanda used one or two SA-7 or SA-14 MANPADs to shoot down a Congolese Air Lines B727-30 '9Q-CSG', killing all 41 crew members and passengers on board.

Intensive strikes by Hawks and Lynxes caused heavy losses to ANC units under Commander Rigobert, that – using rubber boats, an old ferry, and anything else that floated – crossed the Congo River and assaulted Kindu airport. But, to no avail: the FAC and Ugandans began deserting in large numbers. Realizing the futility of the effort, the Zimbabweans eventually withdrew from the city on 13 October, leaving behind around 1,000 Congolese and Ugandan fighters to march into captivity.

The Rwandans and mutineers first cleared the local airport, and during the following night at least three medium-sized transports of Centrafrican Airlines and Air Cess Rwanda were observed landing. The FAC continued pounding Kindu and its airport with artillery for a further several days, until forced to fall back on a new defensive position established by the Zimbabweans to the rear.

The loss of Kindu was a heavy blow to Congolese and Zimbabwean plans for the defence of eastern Congo. It opened a large gap between ZDF and FAC troops deployed in southern Equateur Province (especially in the Ikela area) and in Katanga. It prompted Kabila to assign his son as acting chief of staff FAC, ordering him to urgently improve the war-fighting capability of the army. It also enabled the Rwandans and their allies to considerably improve their supply situation. Kindu is relatively close – between 350 and 500km – to military depots in Rwanda and Burundi, which meant that the RPA

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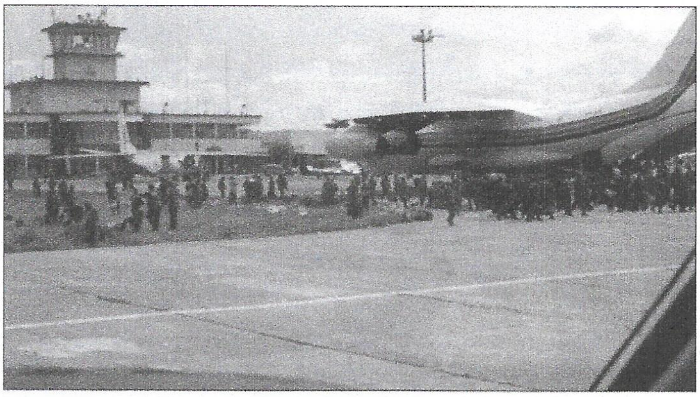
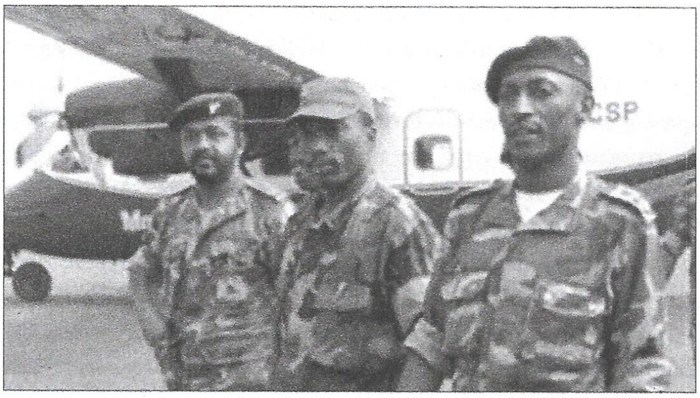
* While failing to take Lulingu in September 1998, the Mayi-Mayi returned in July/August 2000, when their attack nearly resulted in the capture of the town, having inflicted heavy losses on the ANC/RPA units there.



An Ilyushin Il-76 transport of the Sudanese paramilitary air freighting company AZZA, seen at N'Djili IAP, deplaning fighters of the West Nile Bank Front in early October 1998. At left, directly below the control tower, is an FACA An-26. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



Joseph Kabila (centre) with Angolan General Joao Matos at N'Djili IAP, 30 August 1998. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

Left: Except for its helicopters, the RPA was heavily dependent on the use of transport aircraft owned by Victor Bout – not only for flying reinforcements and resupplies to recently secured airfields, but also for trafficking loot out of the DRC. Dozens of Antonov An-12B transports – like this example operated by the GLBC (Great Lakes Business Company, an enterprise run by Victor Bout's associates) – played a dominant role in this military operation cum business enterprise. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

and FAB now enjoyed the advantage of much shorter communications than their opposition. The Zimbabweans had to haul nearly all their supplies along a 1,500km-long road from Harare through Zambia, or by aircraft over 1,200km, from Harare or Kinshasa to Kamina. The Angolans and Namibians were in an even poorer position because nearly 2,000km separated them from their bases.

Reversals at Kabalo

After securing Kindu, the RPA and ANC used the aircraft of Air Cess Rwanda to swiftly reshuffle their troops for another offensive farther south. On 13 October 1998, they surprised the FAC garrison at Kabalo – an important port and railway junction overlooking a road and rail bridge over the Congo River in between the Lukuga and Luvua rivers with a small airfield nearby – and captured the town.

The loss of Kabalo was something the ZDF commanders could not tolerate, being the main supply route to their own and Congolese units still holding along the Congo River between Kabalo and Kindu in the north. Therefore, a full battalion of Zimbabwean infantry, supported by commandos and the SAS Special Boat Squadron, was deployed to launch a counterattack and retake the place. The RPA and ANC troops in the town were first put under intensive attack by AFZ Hawks and Lynxes. Then the ZDF troops advanced along the western side of the Congo until stopped some 300m short of the bridge south of the town, finding it secured by well-entrenched Rwandans, on 23 October. Instead of attempting a frontal assault on a well-fortified position, the Zimbabwean commander re-routed his force, returning to a ferry farther south and using it to cross the river out of Rwandan sight. The following assault on Kabalo was executed in the best traditions of the Fireforce tactic developed by the Rhodesians in the 1960s and 1970s. At first, four AFZ Hawks attacked all the known AA gun positions. One of them even knocked out a Rwandan ZSU-23-4 Shilka SPAAG using 68mm unguided rockets. Next, the slower Lynxes and then Alouette K-Cars took over, keeping the enemy down with suppressive fire while AB 412s landed the SAS troops at selected targets. Finally, the ground troops assaulted the enemy positions, seemingly out of nowhere. The attack took the Rwandans by surprise, with the Zimbabweans destroying most RPA and ANC positions outside Kabalo, and scattering survivors into the jungle. However, resistance on the outskirts of town was too strong, as the RPA had meanwhile dug in well and constructed extensive underground defences. Therefore, after remaining in the area for slightly over a week, and although not coming under any kind of Rwandan counterattack, the Zimbabwean unit was withdrawn from its exposed position on the eastern side of the Congo River. Kabalo thus remained in Rwandan hands for the rest of the war.*

The AFZ offensive

The success in Kabalo emboldened the Congolese. Driven by the prospect of lengthy political negotiations that would bring an early end to the fighting, and thus the necessity to 'put flags on the map', they suggested a deployment of additional troops, reinforced by the 5th Battalion NDF and a ZDF task force, including a squadron of Cascavels, to Manono, with the intention of launching an offensive – Operation Kalemie – in the direction of Kalemie and Moba. On paper this idea appeared quite promising, as at that time there were only a few RPA and RCD/ANC units in the area, some in no condition to fight. Furthermore, an attack from the south – instead of the west, into what was considered a Rwandan backyard in the eastern DRC – was more likely to come as a surprise to the Rwandans. However, Major-General Mike Nyambuya could not assemble the required forces quickly enough, which in turn left enough time for the Rwandans to reorganize and reinforce their scattered troops, primarily by rushing two ANC brigades to Nyuzu and Moba. Additionally, Kigali requested reinforcements from Burundi. The government in Bujumbura responded by deploying two additional battalions with nearly 2,000 troops under the command of 211 Brigade RPA.

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* Nevertheless, the ZDF was in possession of Kabalo for long enough to inspect it properly before withdrawing. Between the dozens of bodies the Zimbabweans recovered for identification were those of a number of Europeans – subsequently identified as Israeli, Serbian, South African and even US mercenaries, some of whom were involved in operating mortars, while the others ran logistic operations.

In order to slow the deployment of enemy reinforcements, the Zimbabweans again unleashed their air force for harassment and interdiction strikes. The resulting campaign – dominated by Hawks – was to last well into 1999 and mark another high point of the AFZ's activity during the war. Indeed, the Zimbabwean attacks put the Rwandans and Burundians under such pressure that the RPA felt compelled to deploy its brand-new Air Defence Regiment to the Kalemie area where, by mid-November 1998, it established an integrated air defence system centred around one SA-2 and one SA-6 site, a company of ZSU-23-4s, a large number of ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns and two batteries of Russian-made 37mm S-60 AA guns, around a dozen MANPAD teams equipped with SA-14s, SA-16s and SA-18s, and even a team of experienced UNITA fighters equipped with a few US-made FIM-92A Stingers under the command of Major 'Chipepe' and Captain Jose Kwalo. In summary, MANPADs of all possible sorts soon became a common sight in that part of eastern Congo.

The tactics the AFZ pilots employed during these operations were relatively simple. Like all other AFZ aircraft, Hawks had no RWRs, no chaff and flare dispensers and – actually constructed as light training jets – no built-in redundancy systems designed to enable their survival in the case of combat damage. Therefore, they relied on flying at extremely low level, using pods for unguided rockets and a 'one pass, haul ass' tactic for survival. However, time and again, specific targets required the deployment of high-explosive bombs; in order to drop these, pilots had to climb before diving to attack, in turn exposing themselves to all sorts of armament at the enemy's disposal. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of MANPADs were fired at them in these cases, and the Zimbabweans not only showed much skill, but were outright lucky to avoid all of them.

Initially, the AFZ Hawks flew armed reconnaissance sorties – some of them armed with Chinese-made PL-7 air-to-air missiles – and attempted to intercept transport aircraft and helicopters distributing RPA and RCD troops and supplies between airfields along Lake Tanganiyka. One of the targets they were specifically looking for was an Aérospatiale SA 330 Puma, painted in white overall, often reported as sighted at various places between Kalemie and Kisangani, and possibly used for VIP transport.

However, due to inclement weather – mostly frequent and severe thunderstorms – but also because of non-existing radar coverage and because most transport aircraft operated by night, these efforts were in vain. Therefore, the AFZ returned to its old tactics of deploying SAS teams behind enemy lines with the task of searching for truck convoys moving along the roads between Kalemie, Nyuzu and Kabalo, while keeping a watchful eye on local airfields.

The Zimbabwean aerial offensive was further intensified when the allies opened Operation Kalemie by advancing on Nyuzu and Moba on 18 November 1998. The fighting was heavy and the Congolese were initially stopped short of their objective, prompting the ZDF to launch several additional Fireforce operations round enemy flanks.

Through October/November 1998 the FAB began deploying its troops inside the DRC. Here a Burundian soldier talks with local civilians. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

The AFZ supported these operations and continued keeping enemy supply lines under pressure. On 21 November, the Hawks sank six large boats on Lake Tanganyika, reportedly causing over 600 Rwandan and Burundian casualties.* Early the following morning, the SAS deployed near Kalemie, and reported the presence of at least two transport aircraft on the local airfield. Four Hawks were scrambled from Pweto, flown by flight lieutenants Jaya, Ncube, Brooks and Enslin. They reached the target area at first light despite bad weather, and after approaching along the coast, over the docks and town, they delivered a slashing attack in the face of massive anti-aircraft fire. As the formation leader, Flight Lieutenant Jaya, was leaving the target area in a northerly direction, he advised Enslin of enemy aircraft on the apron of the airfield. Enslin managed to correct his attack while approaching over Lake Tanganyika to accurately deliver his bomb on this target of opportunity. Enslin's weapons destroyed at least one, and damaged another twin-engined transport aircraft at Kalemie.

Late in the evening of 23 November, the AFZ returned over Kalemie airport to bomb it again, though this time it was a lone C-212 of No. 3 Squadron, flown by Wing Commander Gwata and Squadron Leader Garwe that dropped five ZDI-made Arigoma bombs with the help of a hand-held GPS receiver and, despite a tropical thunderstorm, accurately hit the camp of an ANC unit freshly arrived in the area.

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* AP report, 24 November 1998; in an unrelated incident, according to the same AP report, it was on the same day that ANC commander Jean-Pierre Ondekane and 126 of his troops escaped injury when the Boeing 727 they were aboard caught fire while taking off from Goma IAP.

A pre-delivery photograph of the Hawk Mk 60 '601' in interceptor configuration – carrying AIM-9 Sidewinder air-to-air missiles under the outboard underwing pylon, drop tanks on inboard underwing pylons and a pod with ADEN cannon under the centreline. The AFZ Hawks flew hundreds of interception sorties over the eastern DRC, trying to intercept aircraft and helicopters supporting the Rwandan and Burundian war effort, but without success. *Photo BAe Heritage*

Operation Kalemie

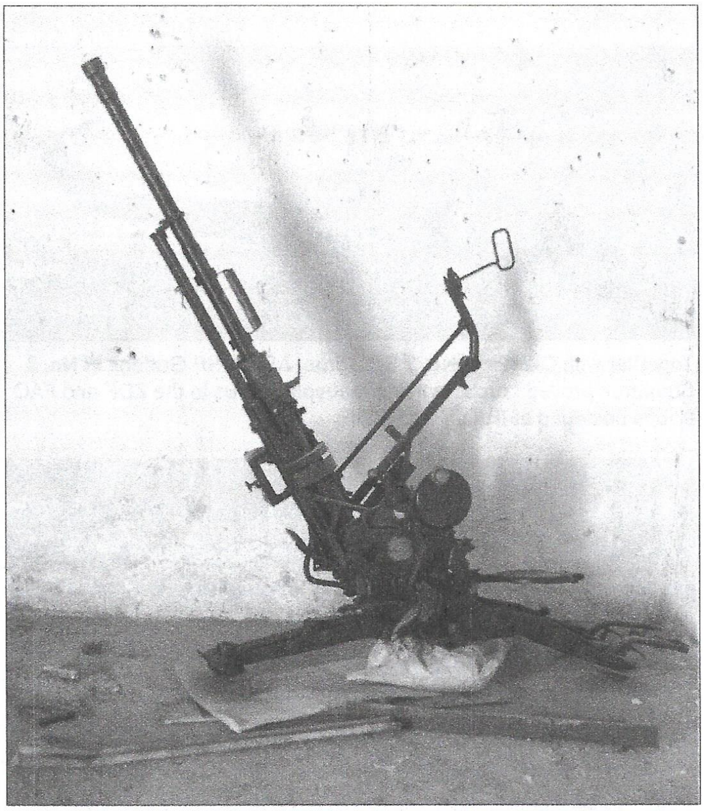
Meanwhile, the Congolese and Zimbabwean ground troops continued pushing toward Nyuzu. Their northern column, consisting of a company of ZDF paras in the front, followed by an FAC brigade, ran into an ambush that saw nearly 2,000 Congolese troops running from the battlefield when hit by a barrage from Rwandan BM-21 MRLs. Although losing seven killed, the Zimbabweans fought back resolutely, only to find themselves isolated deep behind enemy lines and critically short of ammunition. Once again, the AFZ scrambled to help, deploying Alouette IIIs and AB 412s to Manono from where they operated intensively in an attempt to resupply the paras and evacuate casualties – until the zone became too hot for them to continue operations.

During the night of 22 November 1998, C-212s from No. 3 Squadron took over. Flight Lieutenant Ernest Matsambira flew three resupply sorties at critically low levels to paradrop ammunition boxes, because there was no airstrip where he could land. The situation the surrounded paras faced remained critical and during that night Matsambira was called in to fly another resupply sortie; this time he had to land and evacuate four badly injured paras. The pilot landed on a small, muddy clearing in the jungle, which was under intense mortar fire. The vertical stabilizer of his C-212 was sprayed by shrapnel and the aircraft received a number of 7.62mm hits, but the crew managed to unload ammunition and evacuate their casualties safely. Matsambira was later decorated with the Golden Cross of Zimbabwe for his performance in this operation.

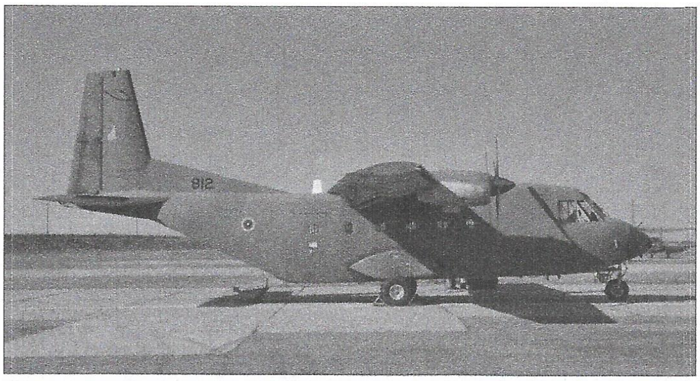
Zimbabwean reinforcements not only managed to reach the isolated company but also Nyuzu during the first week of December, while the troops of the 5th Battalion NDF reached the Moba area in the face of vicious RPA counterattacks. Under pressure to prevent another collapse of shaky FAC units that usually followed, the ZDF reacted with a series of Fireforce operations, aiming to stop, encircle and destroy specific RPA and ANC units. However, weeks-long intensive combat operations began to show their effect on 13 December 1998, when the AFZ suffered its first heavy loss of the war. While controlling a Fireforce attack on Niemba, an Alouette III that served as the airborne command post was hit by ground fire and shot down. The commander, Colonel Alphonso Kufa, and his pilot, Squadron Leader Herbert Vundla (a leading tactician in the AFZ),

Rwandan and Burundian helicopters underway over the eastern DRC proved evasive targets that the Zimbabweans never managed to intercept. This pre-delivery photograph of a Rwandan Mi-171 with serial 'RAF-1707', shows it underway over water at low level – under similar circumstances as in the area around lakes Kivu and Tanganyika. *Photo Kazan Helicopters*

A pair of AFZ Hawks in close formation. The aircraft with serial '606', to the right, still shows the heavy wear the deployment in the DRC caused to its camouflage pattern. *Photo via Tim Zigenthaler*



ZPU-1 anti-aircraft machine gun, as deployed in large numbers by nearly all involved parties during the Second Congo War, usually on Toyota Land Cruiser 4WD pickup trucks.



The ZDF lacked troops to establish a continuous front line in the eastern DRC and thus sought to deploy them to secure specific towns, while FAC units were responsible for maintaining supply communications. The Rwandans exploited the situation by attacking the Congolese and isolating forward-deployed Zimbabweans. Whenever such a situation developed, C-212 light transports of No. 3 Squadron AFZ were called on to provide urgently required resupply and evacuate casualties. *Photo Tom Cooper Collection*

ZDF soldiers at Ikela, after the siege has been lifted, with long beards after days without shaving. *Photo July Shamu/The Herald/ZDF*

Together with C-212s of No. 3 Squadron, AB 412SP Griffons of No. 8 Squadron proved crucial in flying resupply sorties to the ZDF and FAC troops besieged at Ikela. *Photo ZDF*

Like the Rwandans, the Ugandans also made extensive use of chartered civilian transports for resupplying their troops deployed in the DRC, but also for trafficking loot. This busy scene on the tarmac of Bunia airport, shows a Showa Air An-12B (about to be loaded with sacks probably containing coltan), in the foreground, and an Air Uganda L-100-30 in the background. *Photo via Guido Potters*

were killed. The gunner, Flight Sergeant Edson Sande, was captured by the Rwandans.[*]

Ultimately, the forces involved in Operation Kalemie did not manage to break through to the port of Kalemie, but the Namibians did reach Moba on 14 December, suffering one killed and seven injured. The allies were then forced to stop and reorganize – which was something the RPA and ANC badly needed as well. It was around this time that, under immense pressure from the international community, with the help of mediators from a number of different countries and the UN, an agreement for the first of many ceasefires between the belligerents was reached.

Turned down by the government in Kigali and the RCD leadership, it offered them an opportunity to regroup and prepare a new offensive; it also convinced the Rwandans and other rebels that their opponents were on the verge of collapse, and was the major reason why they were not ready to accept any compromises.

Siege of Ikela

Very few reports about the partial success of Operation Kalemie reached the public, the reason being a crisis that had erupted in southeastern Equateur Province. In late November 1998, a battalion each of RPA and ANC troops advanced from Kisangani toward Ikela, crossing the Tshuapa River on either side of the town, trapping a company of around 170 FAC and 158 troops of the 5.1 Battalion ZDF based there, before continuing for another 30km in the direction of Lodja. Under the command of Lieutenant Shame and Warrant Officer Chibhame, the Zimbabweans and Congolese fought back ferociously, losing five killed while evacuating casualties, arms, equipment and supplies to Ikela. Once there, they realized that they were cut off. This was not the first – and certainly not the last – time the ZDF troops had been encircled during this war, but it was the only time they could find no way of breaking out. They were forced to hold out within their less than 1,000m-wide defence perimeter that was backed up against a 400m-high hilltop on its northern side, and included a straight, asphalted stretch of the Route N7 with a bridge on the southern side, and a few minor hills south of it.

The air force and the SAS Special Boat Squadron were the only forces that could ensure the survival of the troops besieged at Ikela.

Deploying AB 412s of No. 8 Squadron commanded by Squadron Leader Dave Atkinson, the AFZ began flying supplies to Ikela and evacuating casualties, usually under top cover provided by Alouette K-Cars. Similarly, the SBS used fast boats to reach the perimeter by night. Each of these resupply operations required excellent coordination by all those involved, in order to ensure that the Rwandans and ANC combatants were pinned down – whether by fire from helicopters, or that of the defenders. When the RPA increased the pressure on the besieged troops and damaged an Alouette on 7 January 1999, a decision was taken to proceed with all supply operations via C-212 transports of No. 3 Squadron AFZ, and only at night. Using hand-held GPS receivers, the pilots flew through the darkness and severe thunderstorms, landed on the short, narrow road, the crews unpacked the loads via the rear ramp while the plane's engines were still running, and then swiftly took off once again.

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[*] A few days later, the RCD claimed to have shot down no less than four helicopters and two Zimbabwean MiGs between 7 and 15 December. Officially, Harare confirmed the loss of the Alouette carrying Colonel Kufa a few days later, and affirmed the ZDF had suffered a total loss of 30 killed in the Second Congo War by this time. While this figure appears surprisingly low, it should be kept in mind that previous fighting during the First and Second Congo Wars had not caused many casualties on either side. Furthermore, not only was the ZDF the most professional, and one of the most combat-experienced military forces of the war, but the Rwandans and the RCD were not experienced in fighting an opponent of this kind; actually, so far, they had barely encountered an enemy who did not flee when the first shots were fired.

Most of these operations were supported by the second or third C-212 that attempted to suppress the nearest enemy positions, or bomb Rwandan mortar positions, by dropping loads of ZDI-made Arigoma bombs, rolled off from the rear platform. Several AFZ officers, including Wing Commander Alphios Gwata, earned themselves high decoration for flying such missions during the siege of Ikela, which was to last for nearly two years. Squadron Leader Erasmus Garwe of No. 3 Squadron received the top medal for bravery, the Silver Cross of Zimbabwe, while Lieutenant Shame and Warrant Officer Chibhame received Medals of Bravery.

UPDF troops pose in a captured Ugandan insurgent base in northeastern DRC. Early during the Second Congo War, Ugandan offensives delivered heavy blows to the ADF. However, they failed to prevent the insurgents from continuing operations inside the Congo and from launching attacks into Uganda. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

The Chadian Army units deployed during the Second Congo War were not the best equipped of the conflict and were shoddily dressed, but they proved a very effective, highly mobile and a fierce fighting force. The driver of a 'technical', a Toyota Land Cruiser equipped with the ZU-23 flak, takes a cigarette break.
Photo Mark Lepko Collection

Ugandan invasion

Although Kampala officially affirmed that it had no involvement in, or foreknowledge of, the FAC mutiny or of Kabarebe's attempt to topple Kabila, the top UPDF commanders were eager to join the new Rwandan invasion. Interestingly, the Ugandan government further affirmed that it had no troops present in the DRC as of 2 August 1998, except for three battalions with around 2,000 soldiers in Beni and Butembo, supposedly present with the consent of the Congolese authorities. Their operations in the Second Congo War began on 9 August, when one battalion was sent in the direction of Bunia, which was secured a few days later.

The 7th Infantry Battalion meanwhile advanced toward Watsa, and occupied it on 24 August, while – in reaction to a Rwandan invitation – the entire 305 Brigade UPDF was deployed with the help of transport aircraft to Kisangani-Bangoka IAP, where it arrived on 1 September 1998, and where the Ugandans subsequently established the HQ of their operations in the DRC.

Generally, initial Ugandan operations met next to no resistance, because the FAC presence in the Upper Congo Province was practically non-existent, and because they managed to overrun several ADF bases as they advanced on Munubele (taken on 17 September), Bengamisa (18 September), Banalia (19 September) and Isiro (20 September), before continuing toward the Tele Bridge, which was secured on 29 September, then Buta (3 October), Aketi (6 October) and Dulia, secured on 27 October. After receiving supplies and reinforcements delivered by transport aircraft in early November, the Ugandans continued their march on Bumba, on the Congo River, which was taken on 17 November. From there, they intended to continue deep into the Equateur Province, toward Gemena and Gbadolite. Underway there, the Ugandans first secured Lisala on 12 December 1998, before taking Gemena on Christmas Day.

Busy fighting in Bas-Congo and then in Kasai-Occidental and Katanga, the FAC lacked reserve units for deployment in the Equateur Province.

Furthermore, presidents Museveni and Kabila met under Libyan mediation during December 1998, attempting to enter a separate peace agreement. It was only once the first round of these talks did not result in an immediate agreement, that a decision was taken by the Congolese to move a small FAC brigade (two battalions), the Chadian contingent (a motorized brigade of 2,227 officers and other ranks deployed in Kinshasa in late August 1998) and an FAC company of Type-59 MBTs to Gabdolite, on the border with the Central African Republic.

In early January 1999, these troops launched a counteroffensive, Operation *Tranquenard* (Foxtrap), which was followed by a number of air raids against known Ugandan headquarters and supply depots. The Chadians launched a typical *rezzou*, a high-speed, raid-style attack by columns of highly-mobile Toyota 4WDs armed with an assortment of heavy weapons. They defeated the UPDF defenders of Businga on 9 January and liberated Lisala and Bumba in similar style two days later, thus crushing Ugandan hopes of a swift and easy conquest of Equateur Province. According to official Chadian releases, the FANT troops captured 121 Ugandan and Rwandan soldiers during the course of this operation.*

However, after this advance of nearly 500km, the FAC and Chadians ran out of steam. They were not only in need of reinforcements necessary to secure the areas they had liberated, but also of supplies and maintenance.

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* Chad is the only country known to have released any firm, reliable figures in regard to its military participation in the conflict.

CHAPTER SIX:
ARMS RACES AND POLITICAL MANOEVERING

Through January 1999 most of the front lines of the Second Congo War stabilized as both alliances found their military forces overstretched and in urgent need of reorganization, resupply and a rethinking of their strategy and tactics. Furthermore, during the second quarter of 1999, the first rifts between Rwanda and Uganda appeared, placing not only much stress on their mutual relations, but also further complicating the war.

The outbreak of the Second Congo War prompted frenetic attempts by nearly all the belligerents to obtain more arms and equipment for their military forces. Rwanda and Uganda, as well as the RCD, managed to capture plenty of weaponry, recently purchased for the FAC and stored at various bases in the Kivus. They also stole at least one shipment of infantry arms and ammunition ordered by Kinshasa from China, which arrived at the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam in late August 1998. However, when it came to heavy armament, Uganda placed by far the largest orders. A total of 62 T-55 MBTs, 20 Tatra trucks and about 80 tons of mortar ammunition from the Ukraine, as well as six additional MBTs and a large consignment of associated ammunition and spares from Slovakia, all via the Israeli company Silver Shadow. This arrived in Dar es Salaam between November 1998 and mid-January 1999. Many of these shipments were distributed at various points in the DRC with the help of Lockheed C-130 aircraft chartered from the Swiss company, Aviation Support and Training Organization, but also using air freighting companies like VR Promotions, Planet Air and New Goma Air (both owned by the RCD), which are known to have hauled over 1,800 tons of military equipment from Entebbe to Kisangani between September and December 1998.

The UPDF/AW's helicopters were deployed heavily in support of ground advances through the Upper Congo, where at least one crashed due to bad weather, prompting Kampala to place orders for additional Mi-171s from Kazan Helicopters, overhaul the two Mi-24s purchased from Belarus and acquire additional Mi-24s. Furthermore, in late 1998, Silver Shadow mediated an acquisition of six ex-Polish Naval Air Force MiG-21bis and one MiG-21UM, and several 100mm KS-19 anti-aircraft guns. However, service entry of this equipment was marred by technical problems, which necessitated their shipping to Israel for overhauls and upgrades, and a lack of Ugandan pilots. In fact, training UPDF pilots on ex-Polish fighter jets began in Israel in November 1999, and was only completed in 2004, after the official end of the Second Congo War.

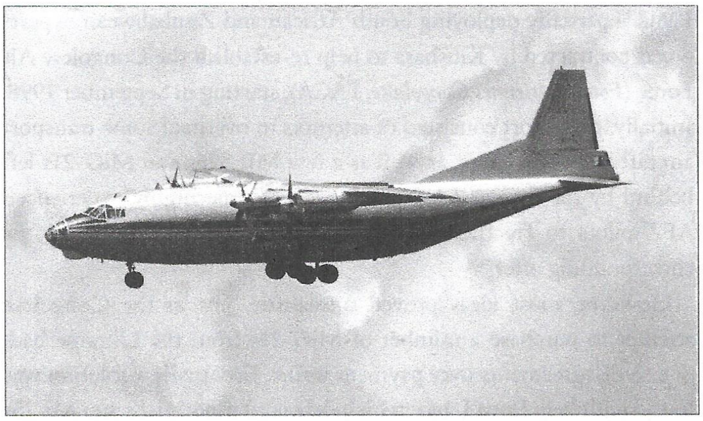
Rwanda then jumped on the acquisitions band wagon, but this time the Israeli PMC, Air Defence Consultants Corporation (ADCC), was not as successful in getting the government to sign an order for between six and ten MiG-21s, despite Danny Reshef (a leading ADCC official) visiting Kigali from 30 September to 12 October. The RPA leadership eventually concluded that such aircraft would be ill suited to its needs and too expensive to operate.

After failing to raise the RPA's interest in MiG-21s, the ADCC entered similar negotiations with RCD authorities, offering them help in setting up their own air force, providing aircraft, armament, ground equipment and the services of experienced foreign pilots. This proposal failed because of a lack of funding. Instead, as it was now awash with money from gold and coltan trafficking, the RCD was perfectly happy to continue its relationships with private airline companies – including Planet Air and New Goma Air (both of which came into being in 1999 and used aircraft registered in Swaziland) and KNG Transavia, primarily deployed for the transport of illegally extracted minerals.

Nevertheless, the ADCC remained responsible for recruiting experienced Russian and Ukrainian officers and other ranks. Some of these served as pilots and ground personnel for transport aircraft, others flew RPA/AW helicopters and light transports, and still others trained a newly established commando battalion that became operational in early 2000.

The road network in the parts of the DRC occupied by the Rwandans and Ugandans was extremely poor, causing immense logistic difficulties, practically forcing them to fly nearly all their supplies into airfields along the Congo River, from whence they were distributed by barge along the front lines. Because of this, the Rwandans also remained heavily reliant on chartered transport for the movement of their troops and for logistics. To transport ammunition

A Mi-171 from a batch purchased by Uganda in late 1998, to replace the older Mi-8MTV-1/2s, the fleet of which was depleted by combat as well as accidents caused by bad weather. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*



This An-12 (registered as '3C-AAL') was operated by Sharjah-based KNG Transavia company (UAE), associated with Victor Bout and frequently sighted at different airports around the eastern DRC from 2000 onward. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

from Eastern Europe, the Rwandans used two DC-8s (serial numbers '46068' and '45956') of the Silverback Cargo Company, and those of Sky Air Cargo (which usually flew aircraft owned by Occidental Airliners). From Entebbe and Kigali, the weapons were distributed to various locations in the DRC primarily by transports owned by Victor Bout's companies, especially Antonovs wearing the livery of Centrafrican Airlines. One of these, an An-8, crashed on 19 April 2000 while taking off from Pepa, in northeastern Katanga Province, killing the crew of four Russians, six RPA officers and 19 troops.

While much of the Ugandan and Rwandan purchases of these arms were paid for either with the spoils of war or by redirecting development aid provided by the West, it must be observed that there were differences in the way the Ugandan and Rwandan authorities handled the loot. Whereas UPDF officers tended to pillage for their private enrichment, the Rwandans were carefully monitored by the notorious Congo Desk at the ministry of defence in Kigali. It seemed that RPA officers were more disciplined and looted primarily for the benefit of the war effort. Furthermore, Uganda had a more transparent policy of declaring the loot from the DRC for its official exports. The looting intensified once Rwanda and Uganda became openly involved. Deploying their troops to raid local businesses, they collected immense stockpiles of minerals, agricultural products, timber and livestock. Indeed, while Zaire, and then the DRC, had been exporting increasingly smaller quantities of minerals throughout the 1990s, primarily because of the decaying infrastructure, exports of minerals by Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi – all of which had no notable resources of the same – soared in late 1998.

The primary exploitative objectives of Rwanda and Uganda were gold and coltan. Initially, the RPA and UPDF units would simply steal these from local villagers. Over time, the RPA, UPDF and RCD tightened their grip over the mining sector by occupying mining sites in order to directly organize and supervise production and export to Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. According to UN estimates, as much as 60–70 per cent of the total coltan production in the DRC was under direct control of the Rwandan army by late 2002. During much of the Second Congo War, gold and coltan were trafficked out of the DRC in such vast quantities, that it is estimated that the RPA is likely to have harvested US$20 million a month in profits, between 1998 and 2002.

Due to the poor state of local infrastructure, most looted goods were exported by the same transport aircraft that were used for flying in troops and supplies. Indeed, trafficking of coltan – much of which had been funnelled via Burundi since 1995 – proved so profitable that the involved states, foremostly top political and military leaders, became capable of paying foreign air freight companies, or even establishing their own companies to transport stolen minerals out of the DRC. It was in this fashion that a number of new, often short-lived, enterprises emerged. They became so successful and influential that older air freight businesses disappeared. Furthermore, as the new companies increased their networks, so did the exploitation and looting increase, because of the emergence of new transport routes.

Due to the partial transparency of the Ugandan state authorities, it especially became known that the UPDF's presence in the DRC was foremostly of a business nature when, not only its commander in Kisangani, James Kazini, but also Yoweri Museveni's brother and UPDF chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Salim Saleh, became involved in a number of businesses that were neck deep in trafficking goods stolen from the Congo.*

Resurrection of the Congolese Air Force

The situation was quite similar on the other side. With no international embargo on arms imports, the government in Kinshasa was free to purchase extensive quantities from various Eastern European sources, China, North Korea, Libya and probably Iran. In this fashion the FAC acquired 30 T-55 MBTs and 30 D-30 122mm howitzers, delivered in November 1998, and 36 BTR-60s in 2000. Even more so, Kinshasa purchased immense stocks of infantry weapons, ranging from thousands of AK-47s and RPG-7s, light and heavy machine guns, and various mortars, communication systems and other equipment necessary to establish more than a dozen of its own brigades – at least seven CCR/FDLR brigades – and resupply the ALiR, FDD and other insurgent groups that fought on its side. Kabila's administration also contracted a number of PMCs, mostly companies officially based in Great Britain (cooperation with Israel was cancelled quite early on during the Second Congo War when the Congolese learned that Israelis were already involved in supporting Rwanda). In the DRC, such companies were primarily responsible for the protection of highly important installations like the Inga Dam and Atlantic coast ports, VIP protection, and for electronic surveillance and combat support.

Due to the impact of the successful AFZ deployment, another

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* Except for gold and coltan, the Ugandans stole so many cars from the DRC that the authorities in Kampala registered a 25 per cent increase in the number of cars in Uganda in 1999 alone.

PMC – partially deploying South African and Zimbabwean experts – was contracted by Kinshasa to help re-establish the Congolese Air Force (*Forces Aériennes Congolaise*, FACA), starting in September 1998. Initially, this effort consisted of attempts to overhaul some transport aircraft and helicopters, as well as a few MB 326s and MiG-21s left behind by the former FAZA, and recruit some highly experienced AFZ pilots to fly them (the Zimbabweans turned down all the corresponding offers).

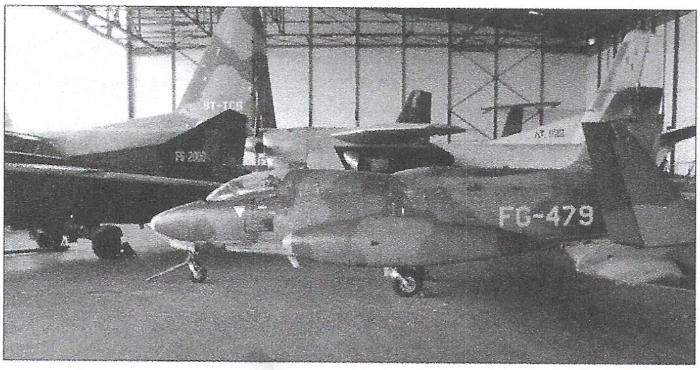
However, most ideas proved unrealistic, just as the Congolese attempt to purchase a number of MiG-21s from the Ukraine had, due to disagreements over payment terms. Eventually a solution was found with help from Libya, which delivered nine Mi-8s and Mi-25s to N'Djili IAP on 17 October 1998, and four MiG-23s about a week later – all these from surplus Libyan Arab Air Force stocks.* Seven other helicopters, including three Mi-24s and four Mi-17s, followed in 2000, at which time the Congolese attempted to buy three Alouette IIIs and an unknown type of British-made heavy helicopters via the Belgian company Damaesia Export. In the latter case however, Belgian authorities seized these at Ostend in May 2000.

While the Mi-8s were immediately put to use and saw heavy service with the newly established Congolese Air Force, MiG-23s proved of limited use; some sources stress that they never became operational. Originally developed as interceptors, they required support from a well-developed radar network for effective operation, but this was practically non-existent over the DRC. Another problem was pilots and ground crew. Although the Libyans took care to deliver all the necessary support equipment, no one in the DRC knew how to service or fly these complex aircraft, which proved dangerous for inexperienced pilots. Thus, while the FACA might have deployed them as fighter-bombers for a short period of time (armed with up to four 250kg bombs or four UV-16-57 pods for 57mm unguided rockets), before long all the MiGs were stored in hangars at N'Djili and Kamina.

Instead, Kabila's administration signed a contract with the Tbilisi Aircraft State Association (TAS) of Georgia, stipulating delivery of eight Sukhoi Su-25 fighter-bombers in November 1999. The aircraft in question belonged to a batch originally manufactured for the Soviet Air Force at the Sloganlug Factory in Tbilisi, in the early 1990s, but were never completed. The first four were delivered to the DRC a few weeks after the contract was signed, on a chartered Antonov An-124 Ruslan transport.

Once assembled by Georgian technicians at N'Djili IAP, the Su-25s were flown by a mixed group of Russian, Ukrainian and South African pilots. The Congolese Su-25 saw extensive combat deployments during the later phases of the war.

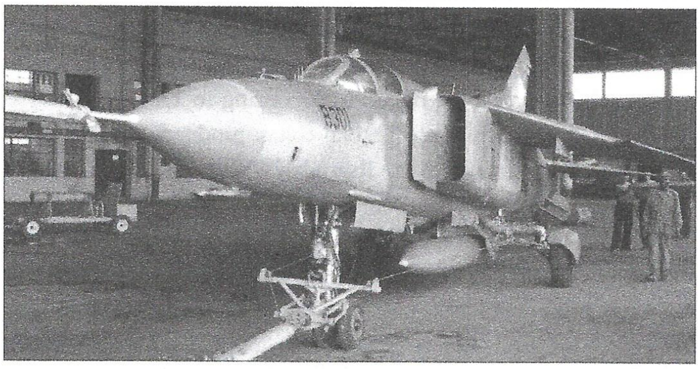
Solving the issue of finding suitable transport aircraft proved much less of a problem. For the purpose of ferrying troops, armament and supplies round the country, Kinshasa contracted several air freighting companies, including TransBalkan Cargo Service, based in Amsterdam. Many of these operated older aircraft, often deployed under rather primitive conditions, which resulted in a number of fatal accidents. On 6 February 1999, an Air Karibu Lockheed L-188A Electra ('9Y-CDI'), operated by Mayani Airlines and rented by the FAC to haul ammunition and fuel to Mbandanka, crashed after



View of the main hangar in the military cantonment of N'Djili IAP. The aircraft serialled 'FG-479' in the foreground is an ex-FAZA MB 326K, probably that flown by a Congolese pilot in a single sortie during the battle of N'Djili in August 1998. The fin to its right belongs to one of several Congolese SF 260s returned to service and flown by Zimbabwean pilots during the war. Between the fins of at least two An-26s and an ex-Libyan MiG-23UB, the fin of the last intact Congolese C-130 Hercules (registration '9T-TCB') can be seen, and in the right rear corner of the hangar is the fin of the last remaining Congolese DHC-5 Caribou transport. *Photo Bundeswehr*

An ex-Libyan Mi-8 (serial '9T-HM7') delivered to the DRC in October 1998. While most of the others were eventually abandoned and used only as sources for spares, this one saw quite a bit of service with the newly established FACA. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

This Mi-25 (serial '9T-HM11') belongs to the batch acquired from Libya in 1998. It saw extensive service during the Second Congo War when it was flown by Zimbabweans. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*



This rare photograph of an ex-Libyan MiG-23MS interceptor was taken inside one of the hangars at Kamina AFB where the aircraft has been stored since its delivery in late 1998. *Photo Petermann Collection* taking off from N'Djili IAP because it was overloaded by 6,000kg, and the flight engineer was performing the duties of the co-pilot, and the ground mechanic those of the flight engineer.

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* After being unloaded, the same Libyan Il-76s which ferried these aircraft to N'Djili were used to fly an entire FAC battalion and its equipment to Kindu.

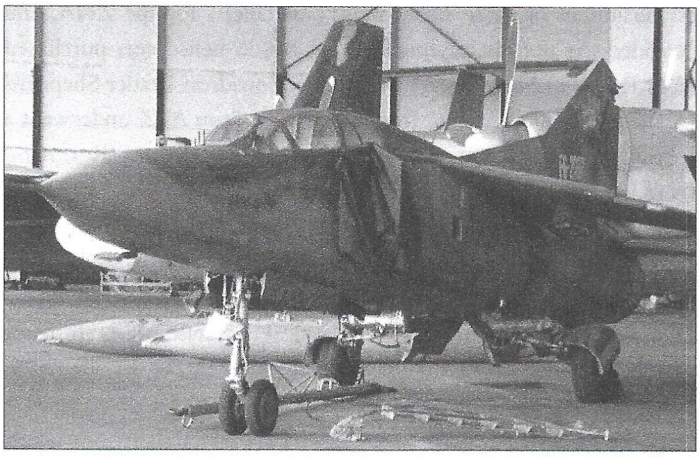
Zimbabwean troubles

Well supplied by ZDI's production of small arms, ammunition and explosives, and bolstered through acquisitions of additional equipment from Latin America, the ZDF experienced relatively few problems in keeping its units deployed in the DRC. Therefore, only relatively small amounts of new armament and ammunition – primarily Chinese-made YW-307 IFVs, Chinese 107mm MRLs and ex-Czechoslovak 122mm RM-70 MRLs and thousands of RPG-7 rounds – were purchased abroad during the war. The only significant change was the replacement of the Belgian-made FN MAG58 standard light machine gun with the Russian-made PKM in all ZNA units.

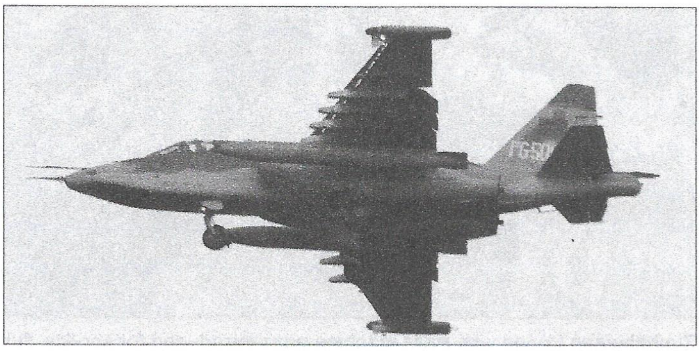
As important was the change in the way the ZDF decided to operate in the future. The Zimbabwean Major-General Amos Chingombe – who replaced Major-General Mike Nyambuya in mid-March 1999 and assumed the overall command of all allied forces in the DRC – was forced to realize that while his troops were expertly prepared in fighting a COIN war against insurgents, they were in fact facing a number of disparate enemies who actually fought in a conventional manner, using conventional tactics and weapons. Furthermore, in an agreement with Kinshasa, Angola and Namibia, the Zimbabweans adapted a strategy of husbanding resources of foreign contingents, while training and reorganizing the FAC in order to enable it to fight the war on its own.

This change of strategy, to no small degree dictated by political necessities, required something unusual of the ZDF, namely the establishment of conventional front lines, roughly from Ikela to Mbuji-Mayi (Kasai Front) and from Kabalo to Moba (Katanga or Southern Front). Because of the limited size of the Zimbabwean and other foreign contingents that could be maintained in the DRC, these front lines had to be held by relatively small detachments, forward-deployed to secure minor towns and villages, well in front of major logistic centres and land communications that were secured by the Congolese army. While offensive operations were subsequently limited to an absolute minimum, the holding of these front lines somewhat eased logistic burdens as they were then relatively close to major depots in Kamina and the road connection to Zimbabwe. It is precisely the issue of logistics that remained the major challenge of Kabila and his allies throughout the war. Distances from Kinshasa, Angola and Namibia, and the congestion of the road link from Zimbabwe via Zambia necessitated the transportation of the majority of ammunition and fuel by transport aircraft, which proved very expensive and thus put a major burden on the cash-strapped finances of all the involved countries.

Much Zimbabwean aid for the DRC during the first year of the war was financed by Libya. It supplied three MiG-23MS interceptors and one MiG-23UB dual-seat conversion trainer to the AFZ in June 1999 (these were never deployed in the Congo), paid for the



This ex-Libyan MiG-23UB two-seat conversion trainer ended its days inside the main hangar on the military side of N'Djili IAP. Although receiving the FACA serial 'FG-2000' and apparently flown on a few occasions, the aircraft soon became inoperable and has been stored ever since. Notable is the omission of ejection seats, as well as the application of the fin flash in the form of the Congolese flag officially introduced in 2002. *Photo Bundeswehr*



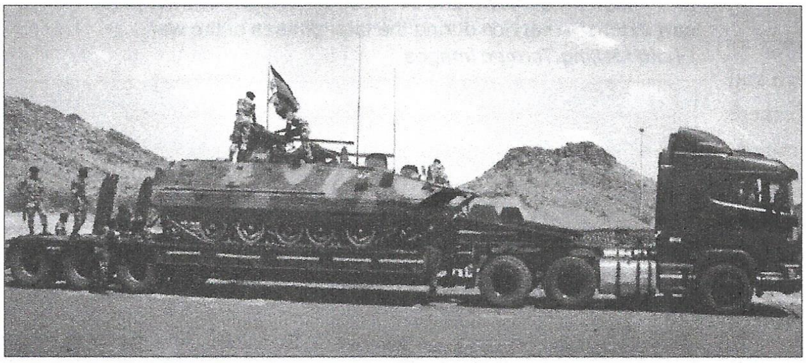
One of four Su-25s (serial 'FG-501') delivered from Georgia in November 1999. Flown and serviced by foreign contract personnel, it saw extensive service during the later phases of the war. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images*

The government of the DRC chartered many different transport aircraft of Soviet and Western origin to haul FAC troops and supplies between Kinshasa and various parts of the battlefield. A number of them either crashed or were written off under dubious circumstances. This privately owned Convair CV-580 survived the war only to end up abandoned at Shabunda airfield in 2004, following some sort of technical malfunction. *Photo via Guido Potters*

Except for chartering foreign transports, Kabila's government also launched several new airlines, like Hewa Bora Airways, which, among others, flew Boeing 727s for VIP transport and in support of the FAC. Notably, at least two of these aircraft eventually entered service with the FACA, where they became known as 'Tolerance Zero'. *Photo Melting Tarmac Images* establishment of three new infantry battalions for the ZNA, and provided the upfront payment for six Mi-35 helicopters purchased from Russia in November 1998. Led by Squadron Leader Shepherd Chakanyuka, pilots drawn from No. 8 Squadron AFZ underwent a hastily organized conversion course at Rostov na Donu (Rostov on Don), on 18 November 1998 and were back in Zimbabwe – with their new mounts – by Christmas that year. Starting their operations over the DRC in January 1999, they soon proved their worth.

However, the longer the war lasted, the more Zimbabwe struggled to maintain the high-end technological element of its military presence in the DRC, namely the deployment of its air force. Following intense combat operations between August 1998 and May 1999, many AFZ aircraft and helicopters were in need of overhaul and spare parts. While Zimbabwean ground crews had proved perfectly capable of maintaining their equipment, the acquisition of spares was a major problem because of a *de facto* embargo Great Britain had imposed upon the government in Harare on the export of any armament-related items. The situation changed temporarily when the British prime minister, Tony Blair, overruled his foreign secretary, Robin Cook, and gave the go-ahead for the necessary sales in January 2000 – a decision that was withdrawn four months later. Instead, the Zimbabweans established a new supply line with the help of Aviation Consultancy Services (ACS) and various businessmen in Kenya. Largely unrecognized by the media at the time, this line functioned very satisfactorily for the rest of the war. In fact, it was so lucrative that ACS owner, John Bredenkamp, approached (unsuccessfully) the government in Kinshasa with an offer for aircraft made by British Aerospace.*

Zimbabwean troops with PKM machine guns introduced for service during the second phase of the Second Congo War. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



A YW-307 (also known as Type-89) IFV of the Zimbabwean Defence Force, as seen during a post-war exercise. It saw service during the war with the newly established 2nd Mechanized Infantry Battalion, a unit tailored specifically for deployment in the DRC. *Photo ZDF*

The war put the ZDF's logistics under such strain that the AFZ found itself forced to purchase an Ilyushin Il-76 aircraft in order to facilitate the transport of troops and supplies from Harare to Kamina and Kinshasa. This aircraft is still operated by No. 3 Squadron. *Photo ZDF*

Another problem the Zimbabweans experienced was the issue of aircraft armament, especially once the extensive stocks the AFZ had found at various Congolese air bases began to dry up. The ZDI did not manufacture all the types of bombs and unguided rockets the AFZ needed and could not manufacture enough of the aircraft armament it had in production, nor was there a way to haul all the necessary ammunition from Harare to Kamina AFB. Therefore, additional shipments were purchased from a number of outside sources that were often delivered straight to the DRC. For example, additional Hunting BL755 CBUs were purchased from the Swiss company Aerotech in 1998, at least one consignment of 66 CBUs was purchased from Cardoen in Chile, and several shipments of general-purpose bombs from Argentina in November 1999. In 2000, the Zimbabweans managed to purchase significant stocks of Russian-made R-60MK (AA-8) air-to-air missiles, FAB-100 and FAB-250 bombs, 57mm unguided rockets and other armament from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Showdown in Kakuyu

After nearly a month of intensive preparations, and in coordination with the Ugandans and the MLC (which were to simultaneously launch an attack on Gbadolite) in mid-February 1999, the RPA and ANC launched a large-scale offensive with simultaneous advances on several fronts: from Kongolo in the direction of Kabalo, from Kasongo on Lubao and Kabinda, and from Kalemie toward Pweto. This operation collapsed within a few days, primarily because of an AFZ counteroffensive which aimed at bombing enemy supply links and denying them the use of all airports held by the Rwandans and Ugandans, and because of an FAC counterattack into the northern side of the 'bulge' of the RPA's advance on Mbuji-Mayi, which resulted in the recovery of Kibombo, 200km south of Kindu.

During January 1999, Air Marshal Perence Shiri, Major-General Mike Nyambuya and the new chief of staff FAC, Major-General Faustin Munene, received intelligence about acquisitions of MiG-21 fighters by Uganda and Rwanda, and their possible deployment inside the DRC. There were also reports of ZDF soldiers hearing jets flying over their positions when there were no AFZ aircraft around, as well as reports of intense transport activity by the RPA and UPDF hauling troops and supplies around the different airfields in eastern Congo at night. While the AFZ scrambled its PL-7-armed Hawks on a number of occasions in reaction to such reports, no interceptions took place, because of non-existent radar coverage. Still, Shiri, Nyambuya and Munene were not ready to take anything for granted. Keeping in mind the importance of maintaining air superiority, but also of the worsening situation regarding the supply of spare parts for the AFZ Hawks, they ordered the AFZ to bomb every airfield within its reach.

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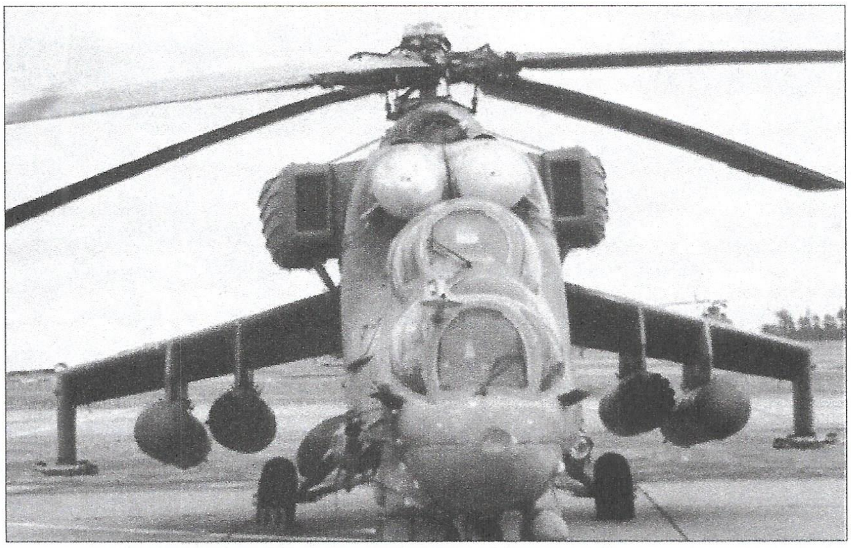
* The value of the ACS spare parts, lubricants, batteries and fuel for the AFZ Hawks delivered in 2000 and 2001, was around US$6.5 million.

On 10 January 1999, Hawks bombed Gemena, Libenge and both airports in Kisangani, causing not only damage to local runways and installations, but also casualties to the ANC, RPA, MLC and UPDF. On 14 January the AFZ C-212 even bombed Goma IAP in coordination with a Mayi-Mayi attack on the airport and the local radio station. On 15 January, Hawks bombed airports in Moba and Kongolo. Although UNITA's MANPAD team claimed one Zimbabwean MiG as shot down, all the aircraft involved returned safely. Nevertheless, the AFZ did suffer a painful loss on 10 January when a C-212 ('802') crashed in bad weather on approach to N'Djili IAP, killing five. Bad weather was also the reason for the collision of two NDF helicopters on 15 January 1999, in which four ZDF officers (including two colonels and a major), two Namibian pilots and three technicians, as well as an FAC colonel and an unidentified person were killed.*



Front view of one of the six Mi-35s purchased by Zimbabwe from Russia in November 1998. It was introduced to service with No. 8 Squadron AFZ and reached the battlefield before the end of the same year. Despite many reports to the contrary, whether at home or in the DRC, Zimbabwean Mi-35s were never flown by foreign pilots. *Photo ZDF*

Although small and equipped with only the most necessary avionics, the AFZ Hawk Mk 60 proved highly versatile, easy to maintain and compatible with a wide range of diverse weapons, which gave it a powerful punch. A pair of aircraft was always held on alert at one of the forward airfields, providing not only a quick-reaction capability in the case of any sort of emergency, but also a massive volume of firepower available at short notice. Many ZDF ground units were saved by their support. Although their missions in reaction to Rwandan ground advances were often predictable, the risk was considered worthwhile by Zimbabwean officers and pilots. *Photo Milpix*

Apart from the intensive AFZ attacks, the Rwandan offensive collapsed because the MLC and UPDF advance was launched too late, only on 1 February 1999. Although superior in numbers and firepower to their opponents, the Ugandans and their allies failed to dislodge the FAC and ANC from Gemena. Farther south, their advancing columns were bombed several times by unknown fighter-bombers, which not only caused casualties, but also slowed the advance. The MLC and UPDF recaptured Lisala on 7 March, and Businga on 11 March 1999, where their advance ended.†

By then, the FAC was already involved in an attempt to raid Kindu and recapture the local airport, but this attack was repelled on 3 March. After monitoring the withdrawal of the involved Congolese units, the RPA and ANC exploited the opportunity to relaunch their failed offensive of January. They pushed a regular RPA brigade in a southerly direction and counterattacked into the Congolese western flank, capturing the town of Penge on 10 March. Attacking from there, the Rwandans simultaneously assaulted Eshimba, north of Kabinda, from the west, and then Kitanda, 100km southwest of Kabalo, hitting an FAC brigade securing the supply line for a battalion of Zimbabwean troops based in Kakuyu. The Congolese suffered heavily. Their battalion in Eshimba lost around 120 killed, while the brigade in Kitanda was practically overrun. It lost over 200 killed and then collapsed, with nearly all the survivors deserting. The Zimbabwean paras first attempted to break through to Kitanda, but found the route in the possession of a numerically superior and well dug-in opponent, losing seven killed in the process. They were now cut off 50km behind enemy lines.

As usual, the Zimbabwean air force reacted with intensive air strikes, hitting the advancing Rwandans heavily, but also prompting the RCD to claim many Zimbabwean MiGs as shot down, including one on 17 March (near Kakuyu), two on 22 March (near Kabinda) and one on 23 March – but only the latter is correct. On 23 March 1999, a pair of AFZ Hawks was dive-bombing Rwandan MRLs outside Kakuyu when a missile sliced between them. The lead Hawk recovered but

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* Curiously, nearly a month later, on 20 February, the RCD claimed both helicopters were shot down by ANC troops. Additionally, the RCD claimed a Zimbabwean MiG shot down in the Kabalo area on 18 February 1999.

† These, as well as other air strikes that took place much later during the conflict, remain one of biggest mysteries of the Second Congo War.

Although better equipped than before, most of the FAC – which meanwhile largely consisted of ex-FAZ and former FNLC and Katangan Tigers, both of whom received proper military training not only at earlier times, but during 1998 and 1999 as well – remained unreliable in combat. Armed with AK-47s and RPG-7s, this group of soldiers is seen while mounted on two Toyota Land Cruisers, thousands of which were deployed for troop transport but also to carry heavy machine guns and light MRLs by nearly all parties involved in the Second Congo War. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

the pilot of the second aircraft, Flight Lieutenant Michael Enslin, found himself facing another two missiles. The first flashed over his cockpit, but the second proximity-fused while passing the jet pipe, forcing Enslin to eject. He injured his legs during ejection and landed behind enemy lines. He managed to evade the RPA and ANC troops who pursued him, but was unable to contact any locals for help as the area was devoid of civilians. He did however manage to join the paras and escaped with them during the following three weeks' fighting withdrawal through the jungle. When they reached friendly lines on 10 April 1999, 54 Zimbabwean paras had been killed or had died of disease and snake bites.*

Meanwhile, the Rwandans brought forward a brigade of ANC, but their assault on Kabinda was repulsed by two fresh Angolan regiments which stabilized the situation on 22 March. Although widely publicized as a success – especially the fall of Eshimba, where the Rwandans were able to show bodies of between 60 and 80 dead FAC soldiers, as well as some of their captured vehicles and artillery pieces – the RPA's victory at Eshimba and Kakuyu was very much a Pyrrhic one. The Rwandans lost over 1,200 soldiers killed and as many injured, and nearly all their vehicles and heavy equipment. Furthermore, as soon as Rwandan troops on forward positions were replaced by ANC units, the FAC deployed one of its newly established brigades from Kinshasa to Mbuji-Mayi and launched a counterattack on Eshimba, in the course of which the rebels lost 800 troops killed, captured or deserted. The RPA returned to the area in late June, launching three successive assaults on Kabinda. However, none managed to punch through, with the last of them resulting in the death of around 240 Rwandan soldiers on 30 May 1999. As the subsequent flow of the war demonstrated, the bloody battle in the Kakuyu area, prompted by a Rwandan attempt to finally defeat the Congolese and its allied forces in the southern DRC, practically neutralized Kigali's chance of advancing further toward Mbuji-Maji for the remainder of the war.

Fall of Manono

The second prong of Kigali's relaunched offensive was even less successful – at least initially. It saw the advance of another regular RPA brigade and two ANC brigades down Lake Tanganiyka toward Kalemie and Moba. During the first few days of the operation the RCD began airing premature claims about the fall of various towns, attempting to panic the shaky FAC, but this effort did not prove successful, as there were only a few Congolese units in the area. In fact, the allied front line in northeastern Katanga was held by the Horizon Brigade CCR, one FDD brigade and 2.2 Battalion ZDF, supported by a squadron of Cascavels and several artillery batteries, as well as AFZ aircraft deployed at Manono. Furthermore, the RPA and ANC supply lines south of Uvira were heavily hit by a series of Mayi-Mayi attacks, while the AFZ also kept the Rwandan supply lines under pressure. On 11 May 1999, two Zimbabwean C-212s escorted by two PL-7-armed Hawks, bombed the airport in Goma again, killing as many as 30 and injuring 50, while another formation bombed the RPA HQ in Uvira, killing two Rwandan officers.

Another problem the Rwandans faced emerged during April and May 1999, when a rift developed within the RCD, primarily between Wamba dia Wamba and Emile Ilungu, when non-Tutsi members began questioning Rwandan and Banyamulenge dominance over the organization. Even the appointment of Mobutu's former head of intelligence, General Celestine Ilunga, as the new chief of staff ANC, only temporarily improved the situation.

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* Prior to the battle for Kakuyu, the ZDF confirmed a loss of 35 killed in the DRC from August 1998 (the RCD alone claimed to have killed over 100 Zimbabwean troops and captured 17). Namibia confirmed a loss of ten killed, most in helicopter accidents (two inside Angola). Furthermore, subsequent investigation into the loss of Enslin's Hawk Mk 60 revealed that the missile that hit his aircraft was pedestal-mounted, indicating the use of French-made Mistral. The team firing the missile consisted of white mercenaries. The Zimbabweans knew that there were Israelis and South Africans supporting the RPA troops in the area because two of them were killed when their Toyota Land Cruiser hit a mine a few days earlier, but did not know they were operating MANPADs. They were to learn of the deployment of advanced MANPADs after a captured RPA soldier confirmed that a group of 18 white mercenaries was operating anti-aircraft missiles and Israeli-made 120mm mortars during the battle of Kakuyu. Enslin did not leave the AFZ after recovering from his injuries; he returned to service and was again posted to No. 2 Squadron. In August 2000, he won the AFZ's coveted Jungle Dustbin Markmanship Trophy in air-to-ground gunnery by scoring record 40 out of a possible 50 rounds on target. Enslin returned to flying F-7s and took command of No. 5 Squadron from Squadron Leader Ncube before immigrating to Australia.

This was the AFZ C-212 that crashed in bad weather on approach to N'Djili IAP on 15 January 1999, killing ten officers and an unidentified person. *Photo Milpix*

Under such circumstances, not only ANC but also RPA commanders experienced significant problems in maintaining and resupplying their advance into Katanga. It was only in late May 1999, after Kigali had made the decision to deploy another reinforced regular brigade of around 7,000 troops to the eastern DRC that the situation began to change and the Rwandans managed to recapture Kabalo. Even then, the large convoys of Rwandan troops moving from Uvira to Bukavu and then to Bunyakiri and Walungu were repeatedly ambushed by Mayi-Mayi and then hit by AFZ fighter-bombers, that also bombed the Kavumu airport north of Bukavu on 3 June.* During the course of these operations the AFZ suffered its second confirmed Hawk loss of the war; one of its fighters was shot down by MANPADs during an armed reconnaissance sortie in the Kagalo area and its pilot was killed, on 23 May 1999.

It was only the exploitation of confusion caused by Kigali's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire on 1 June that enabled the RPA and ANC units to recapture Kalemie two days later. From there, they attacked in the direction of Moba and Manono, claiming them as secured by a rebel unit led by Colonel Sangolo Nura on 8 June.

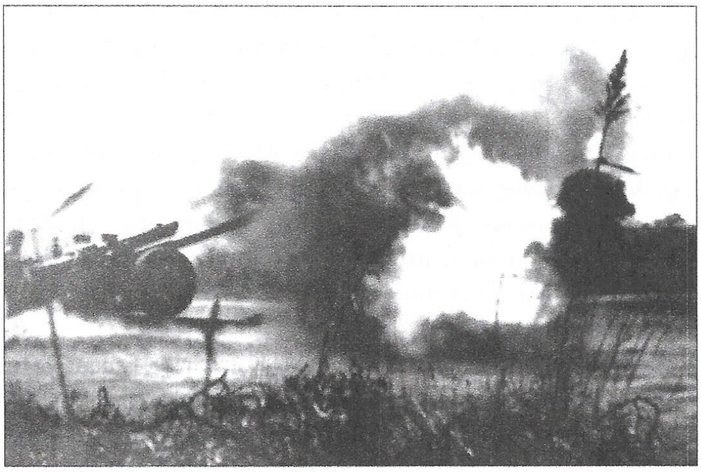
In fact, Manono was at the centre of the ZDF deployment in the area and heavily protected by a 500-strong detachment of the 2.2 Battalion ZDF because of its crucially important airfield, extensively used by the AFZ. The advancing Rwandans were thus put under fierce air strikes by Zimbabwean Hawks, Lynxes and Mi-35s, and suffered heavy losses before reaching the town. In return, they claimed two Zimbabwean MiGs as shot down in the area on 1 June, and one Zimbabwean helicopter on 15 June. Nevertheless, Manono fell on 20 June 1999, after which the Zimbabweans evacuated all their heavy equipment and surviving troops in the direction of Ankoro, some 75km north. The Rwandan advance was subsequently stopped by a contingent of 3,000 fresh ZDF troops, rushed in from Harare to the battlefield as soon as Zimbabwean intelligence learned about the deployment of 7,000 Rwandan regulars in late May.

Chadian withdrawal

After the combined UPDF/MLC offensive was stopped in Businga in March 1999, the front lines in the northern Equateur Province remained quiet for several months. The reason was Libyan-sponsored negotiations between Kinshasa and Kampala that resulted in the Syrte Accord of 26 May 1999, in accordance with which the Chadians decided to withdraw their military contingent from the DRC. Most ANT troops travelled home by road through the Central African Republic, and all were out of the Congo by 1 June 1999. Afterward, the government in N'Djamena published its official figures for the ANT's participation in the Second Congo War, reporting that out of 2,227 officers and other ranks deployed, 105 were lost, including 62 in battle, 13 from disease and snake bites, 30 in road accidents and six as PoWs. N'Djamena also reported that it held 119 PoWs including 27 Ugandans and ten Rwandans.†

Despite their agreements with Kabila, barely a month after the Chadians were out of the war, the Ugandans launched a new offensive and captured Gbadolite on 3 July. The MLC captured Gemena in a night attack on 15 July and then advanced on Zongo (across the border from Central African Republic's capital, Bangui) and from there on Libinge. There followed another lengthy break, required to

After recovering from the injury suffered during his ejection over the DRC, Enslin returned to service with No. 2 Squdron AFZ, and in 2000 won the coveted Jungle Dustbin Marksmanship Trophy. A year later he was reassigned to No. 7 Squadron, flying Chinese-made F-7 interceptors. This photographs shows him with Flight Lieutenant Sam Sigauke, his comrade from the Second Congo War and former holder of the Jungle Dustbin Marksmanship Trophy, in front of the Hawk Mk 60 '605'. *Photo ZDF*



Angolan D-30 howitzer in action in the Mbuji-Maji area in 1999. This Soviet-/Russian-made piece of towed artillery saw widespread service with the Rwandan, Ugandan and Zimbabwean armies, as well as several insurgent organizations during the Second Congo War. *Photo Albert Grandolini Collection*

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* Interestingly, most of these air raids were preceded by timely warnings from Kinshasa, which allowed most civilians to leave the towns that were targeted.

† In comparison, the MLC alone claimed to have killed 200 Chadians and taken 400 of them prisoner.

Except in their primary role, AFZs C-212s were also used as makeshift bombers and flew a number of highly effective air strikes, in the course of which their loadmasters had to roll-out local Arigoma bombs from the rear loading ramp. *Photo Milpix*

Squadron Leader Chakanyuka and pilots from No. 8 Squadron put their six recently obtained Mi-35s to full use during the battle of Manono, flying daily combat sorties in support of ground troops. Although repeatedly hit by ground fire and claimed to have been shot down by Rwandans and Congolese rebels, none of the AFZ Hinds was lost in combat during the Second Congo War. *Photo John Reid-Rowland*

further expand the MLC and resupply the UPDF troops, pending another offensive in the direction of the crucially important port of Mbandanka, at the mouth of the Ruki River. This was interrupted by an FAC offensive launched in mid-October, but repelled within a few days, with the result that the MLC secured Basankusu by 25 November 1999.

Farther south, in March 1999, the ANC attacked into Kasai Occidental, forcing scattered FAC units to flee toward Kananga, committing numerous atrocities and looting as they went. The ZDF counterattacked from Kananga toward Demba and Dimbelenge, resulting in some bitter battles, during the course of which many towns changed hands several times.

Eventually the Rwandans found a solution to outflanking their opponents by marching through dense jungle to take the towns of Pania-Mutuombo and Dimbelenge on 28 May. From there they continued, by crossing the Sankuru River, and capturing the town of Lusambo on 15 June 1999, causing most of the FAC units deployed in the area to disintegrate, leaving relatively small and outflanked Zimbabwean and Namibian contingents to their own devices. Emboldened, the Rwandans then widened their bridgehead and pressed on toward Kananga, capturing the town on 30 June 1999. However, once again, the RPA had suffered such losses in order to reach their preliminary target that assaulting Mbuji-Mayi was out of question. The Rwandans were left without the necessary troops and supplies to continue their operation, at which time Kigali finally came under severe pressure from Washington to hold back on its ambitions in this direction.

Rift in Kisangani

Under intense international pressure, between July and August 1999, all six nations and over 50 rebel leaders involved in the Second Congo War signed an agreement to a ceasefire, to disarm all non-regular military groups, starting with the ALiR, and for all foreign troops to depart. As so often, this agreement proved hopelessly overambitious and, with a few exceptions, all the belligerents continued to seek a military solution. The only difference was that the conflict became even more entrenched as the pillaging of the country's natural resources, as well as violence against civilians, intensified.

The plunder of resources did not function flawlessly. The first squabbles over the distribution of the profits between Rwandan, Ugandan, Burundian and RCD leaders emerged in late 1998. At that time the bosses in Kigali, Kampala and Bujumbura were claiming the lion's share for themselves, while the leaders of parastatals in the DRC found themselves short-changed and unable to meet their financial obligations.* The MLC and RCD were running their own exploitation operations, making deals with foreign businessmen in return for cash – some of which brought them on collision courses with Rwandan and Ugandan leadership.† Over time such disagreements resulted in open tensions, further exacerbated by differences between various RCD leaders, some of whom resented the tight control of the Rwandans.

On 5 August 1999, the Ugandans planned to run a fact-finding mission in Kisangani for a Zambian delegation to gauge the level of popular support for Ernest Wamba dia Wamba of the RCD. This displeased the Rwandans who deployed the 75th Battalion RPA under the command of Colonel Patrick Nyanyumba and two battalions of ANC to the two local airports, as well as into the city centre, successfully preventing the aircraft carrying the Zambians from landing.

Two days later, dia Wamba attempted to hold a political rally in Kisangani; this time to the displeasure of the Ugandans, who not only refused to permit it but also deployed some of their 305 Brigade on the streets, provoking firefights with the ANC and RPA, which eventually saw the deployment of heavy weapons as well. The situation calmed down over the next few days but tensions continued

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* It is possible that one of the earlier quarrels over the distribution of loot resulted in the crash of a TanaMana Aviation BN-2A Islander (registration '5Y-ANV'), on Mount Rwenzori on 25 October 1998. It was carrying James Kazini's brother, a ranking official of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, and Israeli businessman Ze'ev Shif (who worked for Effortc Corporation, a company run by Lieutenant-General Salim Saleh). Reportedly the pilot's body showed two bullet wounds.

† For example, in 2000, the cash-starved RCD established a conglomerate named the *Société Minière des Grand Lacs* (SOMIGL), and provided it with a monopoly for coltan extraction in the Kivus, to finance its parastatal. Ironically, it was under Rwandan pressure that the RCD had to suspend SOMIGL's monopoly a year later. Furthermore, one of the conglomerate's managers – Aziza Gulamali Kulsum – had run a company involved in illegal arms trafficking for the Burundian FDD Hutu rebels. It seems that her large network of contacts in the region and outside Africa held the promise of the RCD dominating the coltan business. something which Kigali did not like in the least.

Youthful Congolese PKM gunners sport the usual mix of camouflaged military fatigues, ex-FAZ pullovers and civilian clothes typical for this army in the late 1990s. While the Chadian withdrawal from the battlefields of northern DRC came as no surprise to the government in Kinshasa, it left the locally deployed FAC units exposed and unable to counter the fresh offensives launched by the UPDF and the much-reinforced MLC. *Photo Jessica Hatcher/IRIN*

to build as both sides began deploying reinforcements in an attempt to strengthen their positions.

A fresh battle erupted on the evening of 14 August and lasted three days, resulting in the indiscriminate shelling of much of the city, causing nearly 600 civilian casualties and forcing much of the population to flee into the jungle. The Ugandans, however, were able to tighten their grip on Kisangani-Bangoka airport. Eventually, Kampala and Kigali found a solution in a ceasefire that provided for Kisangani to be demilitarized. When their joint commission of inquiry, established by the two governments, placed the blame largely on the shoulders of the UPDF, the Ugandans simply refused to accept its verdict and thus the city found itself divided into Rwandan and Ugandan zones. Dia Wamba was ousted and, together with his closest aides, forced to seek refuge in the Ugandan-held parts of the DRC. By 1 October 1999, he had established the RCD-ML and set up his new HQ in Bunia.

Ultimately, the differences between Kampala and Kigali would ruin the alliance and the outlook for their much sought-after military victory. After tensions in Kisangani had turned into open military confrontation, the 'legend' of the mutiny and rebel advance on Kinshasa was revealed to the public as a myth, created to conceal the shortcomings of Kagame's and Museveni's governments. Furthermore, the RPA and the UPDF were now forced to redeploy some of their already overstretched forces in order to face off against one and other.

CHAPTER SEVEN: KINSHASA'S NEW STRATEGY

Heavy losses of the FAC during the battle of Kananga prompted the military commanders and political leaders in Kinshasa, Harare and Luanda to reconsider their strategy. On the one hand, they began to realize that the FAC was unlikely to ever become capable of fighting the war against Rwanda on its own. On the other, they realized that the Rwandan and Ugandan deployment of proxy organizations like the RCD and MLC enabled both countries to present the conflict as a Congolese civil war that in turn lessened the burden on the RPA and UPDF, and thus the cost of the war for these two countries.

However, they also began to understand that the activity of the Mayi-Mayi and ALiR insurgents in the Kivus represented an ever-increasing problem for Kigali, forcing it to deploy troops urgently needed on the Kasai and Katangan fronts and for securing its over-extended supply lines.

Furthermore, after learning of the tensions between Rwanda and Uganda in Kisangani, the government allies in Kinshasa decided to intensify the campaign of aerial raids against crucial enemy bases deep in eastern and northern DRC. This had been going on for some time, initially flown by AFZ Hawks and C-212s. However, starting with attacks on targets in various MLC-held towns in the Equateur Province – including Gbadolite during May/August 1999, which culminated in a heavy bombardment of the MLC HQs in Gmena in October that year – such missions were flown by aircraft that remain unknown today. While Bemba repeatedly claimed they were flown by Sudanese Antonovs, no involved parties are ready to offer commentary regarding the aircraft involved, or even the air force to which they belonged, except to deny any kind of Sudanese involvement. The effectiveness of these attacks was quite high, indicating the level of deployment of aircraft with crews properly trained for the task. However, the places hit were so hopelessly outside of range of combat aircraft available to the Zimbabweans, Angolans and Congolese, that they could not have been flown by any of them. Nevertheless, the list of likely alternative candidates for such missions is substantial. They could have been flown by the Congolese An-26s, the sole Zimbabwean Il-76, or by one of the two Su-27s delivered to Angola.

Some of the strikes in question had the effect of causing additional quarrels between Rwanda and Uganda. For example, on 5 August 1999, the AFZ Hawks delivered a devastating air strike on ferries and large boats connecting Makanza and Bogbonga, some 60km northeast of Basankusu. The ships in question were used by the MLC, UPDF and RPA to transport troops and equipment over the Congo River. When the Hawks destroyed a number of vessels and killed up to 518 soldiers and civilians, Kazini and his Rwandan counterparts began blaming each other for failing to protect vulnerable shipping, while Bemba again complained of Sudanese Antonovs.*

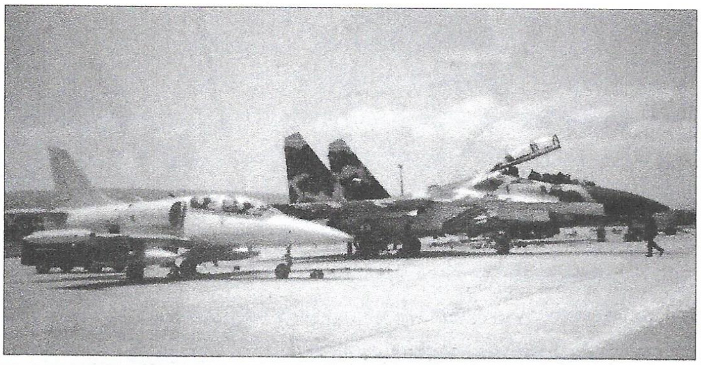
While this raid was in progress, the Bunyakiri Mayi-Mayi attacked in the Shabunda and Nzovu areas of southern Kivu, capturing a local airstrip and then calling in several transport aircraft furnished by Kinshasa to bring in arms and ammunition. This helped the insurgents establish their East Division. Although the RPA was still capable of quickly counterattacking and recovering at least the mineral-rich Nzovu, these two operations, as well as the fighting in Kisangani, further overstretched the Rwandans. By that time nearly 60 per cent of their military was deployed to hold a part of the DRC at least ten times the size of Rwanda, and their logistic system was nearing collapse.

Relief of Ikela

With no end to the war in sight and frontlines remaining relatively quiet through the second half of 1999, the ZDF commanders decided to solve the problem of Ikela. In late November 1999, the Zimbabweans deployed AFZ Hawks, FB 337s and Mi-35s, and an infantry battalion supported by the SBS, in an attempt to lift the siege. The operation began with air raids on Nkembe (240km northwest of Ikela) and Bokungu (64km south of Ikela) on 4 November, which caused up to 100 ANC casualties and forced the survivors to flee. However, by the time the ZDF troops reached Bokungu, the RPA had rushed two battalions, supported by around 50 foreign mercenaries operating mortars and artillery, and stopped the advance in its tracks on 9 November 1999.

After another round of ceasefire negotiations failed in February 2000, the ZDF launched a renewed attempt, this time with the support of Angolan Mi-8/17 helicopters and Namibian troops. A combination of AFZ air raids, SBS riverborne strikes, Fireforce operations and artillery attacks decimated the RPA and ANC troops in the area, prompting many survivors to defect, thus lifting the siege of Ikela. From there, the Zimbabweans and their allies advanced on Opala on the Lomani River, from whence they once again threatened Kisangani (either by land or via Yangambi and the Congo River). However, no follow-up operations were undertaken because there was no interest in again intensifying the fighting. Instead, over the following months, nearly half the ZDF contingent deployed in the DRC was withdrawn.

The RPA was slow to counter. It was only in March 2000 that the Rwandans launched a large-scale operation into the Kasai-Orientale Province. Their attempt to breach the allied front between Ikela and Mbuji-Mayi was initially successful. The RPA managed to capture the town of Lodja, followed by Idumbe in the north, as well as Mashala and Demba in the south. Nevertheless, once again, the Rwandan advance was stopped by mechanized Angolan units a few kilometres short of the Katanga railroad (which connects Kinshasa to the southern province via the Kasai River port of Ilebo). Furthermore, the FAC and ZDF exploited the Rwandan insistence on advancing toward Mbuji-Mayi to launch several local attacks in the direction of Kabalo, Kongolo and Kalemie, thus distracting their enemy sufficiently to enable the infiltration of no less than three CCR battalions – the 3rd, 101st and 106th – and a battalion of FDD through their positions. This operation proved successful, with all four Hutu units eventually marching all the way to South Kivu, where they caused enough concern for the RPA to hurriedly airlift and ferry two regular battalions to Kalemie in early July 2000, but also brutally retaliate against unprotected civilians, massacring thousands between Bukavu and Uvira.



The sole Angolan Su-27UB two-seater (background) and a little-known Aero L-39 Delfin painted in Russian light blue overall. While L-39s saw combat during the Angolan intervention in Congo-Brazzaville in 1997, and were prepared for, but not deployed in combat during the fighting in western DRC in August/September 1998, the Su-27s – known to have been delivered to Luanda in January 1999 – have never been reported as being involved in the fighting in the DRC. Nevertheless, considering their extensive endurance, their suitable avionics and bomb-carrying capability, it is possible that they were involved in at least some of the long-range raids on MLC strongholds later that year. *Photo via Mark Lepko*

With Rwanda and Uganda failing to challenge their presence, except through ground-based air defences, the AFZ Hawks remained in control of the Congolese skies throughout the war, and were thus free not only to provide ground support, but also to strike targets deep behind enemy lines. *Photo BAe*

Six-Day War in Kisangani

During the second quarter of 2000, tensions between the Ugandan and Rwandan militaries deployed in Kisangani began to escalate, and by early May, both had deployed additional troops into the city. On 5 May the local UPDF commanders warned civilians of the imminent bombardment of the city and ordered them to evacuate areas near key ANC and RPA positions. However, President Museveni personally countermanded this order, forbidding his troops to use heavy weapons against the Rwandans. Reportedly, Kigali had an informer in the Ugandan HQ, who advised the RPA of Museveni's order.

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* Bemba was obviously well informed of the widespread deployment of Antonov transports as makeshift bombers by the Sudanese Air Force in its war against the SPLA in South Sudan, and definitely curious to raise sympathies in the West through connecting Kabila's government with Khartoum. However, different sources involved in the fighting on both sides in the Second Congo War repeatedly stressed that no Sudanese Air Force aircraft or any associated aircraft ever became involved.

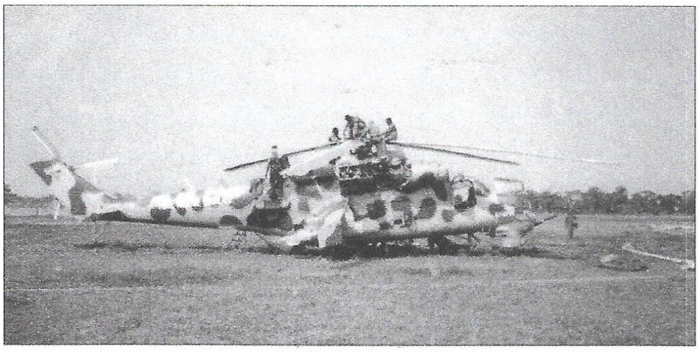
While faking a willingness to end the war and announcing that Rwanda was prepared to quickly implement a phased withdrawal from the DRC, Kagame's troops went into action. A day later, the 75th Battalion RPA assaulted Bangoka airport, reportedly killing 103 UPDF troops in a battle that lasted three hours and forcing James Kazini and his staff to flee their HQ situated in the nearby village of Sotsike.

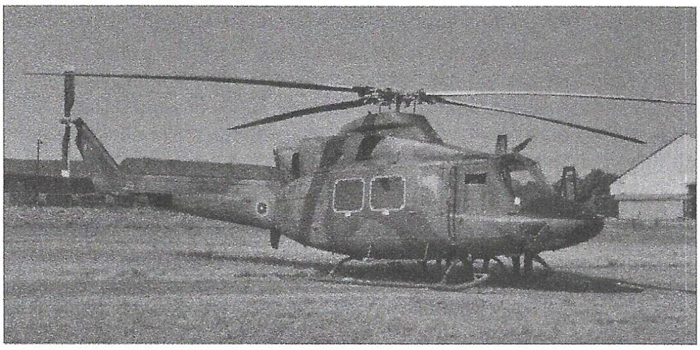
As the fighting spread into the centre of Kisangani, alarmed by the violence, the UN deployed a team of observers to the city, attempting to broker its demilitarization, the implementation of which began on 29 May.

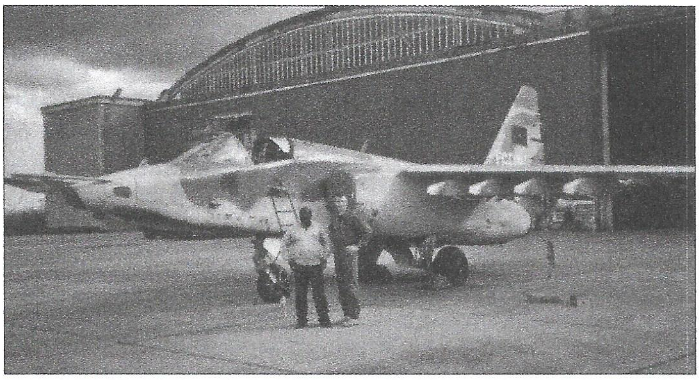
By 4 June 2000, the UPDF withdrew all its forces to Camp Kapalata north of Kisangani (Camp Kapalata was in place to protect a number of diamond mines north of the Tshopo River), except for the survivors of the company who still held part of Bangoka airport. A British pilot who flew one of many B707s involved in hauling arms and supplies between Entebbe, Kigali and Kisangani, recalled the situation at Bangoka that evening:

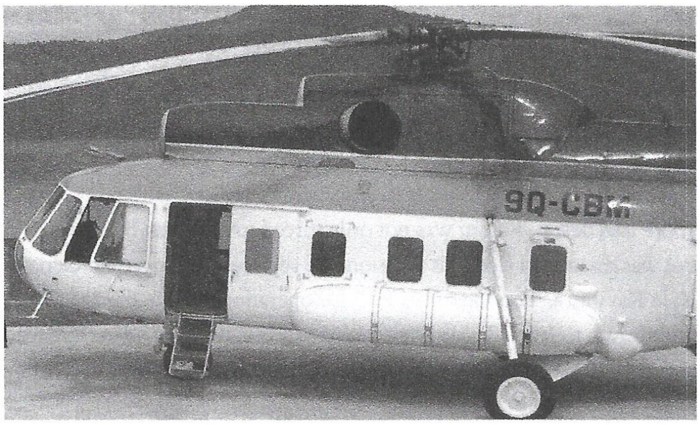
"We were contracted to carry freight from Entebbe in Uganda to Kisangani in Congo, about an hour to the west ... The Ugandan army commander said that he was coming with us, along with about 20 troops, armed with guns and grenades. 'But we've no seats, no pax oxygen and we're not insured to carry passengers,' I explained. Talk of insurance to an African officer going off to war produced much mirth. But we are not in a position to argue, as they were armed and determined. At least they're disciplined and sober, unlike some Zairoise officers on a previous occasion. We check the weapons were not loaded and stored the grenades and magazines downstairs. The army commander, badges of rank almost invisible to prevent sniper targeting, was a decent bloke and after take-off, I made us some coffee and we discussed the army and our BAT [British Army Training] teams, etc. Noticing his bulging pockets and 9mm sidearm with magazine in place, I ask him why he was all 'tooled up', contrary to our request in Entebbe. 'Well,' he says in perfect Home Counties English, 'put it this way. I expect to go down the steps at Kisangani and fight immediately.' On arrival, we found the Ugandans holding the buildings and western end of the airfield and the Rwandans holding the eastern end and touch-down area, with both parties issuing conflicting instructions on the radio. Pidgeon English from the Rwandans and Oxford English from the Ugandans – so you know who to deal with. After we stopped, the Ugandans formed a perimeter around the aircraft ... tension was tremendous ... Our return load was 40 tons of coffee. Not the really important load, of course; that would have been diamonds smuggled out by the warring parties to finance further bloody adventures."

However, around 0800 on the morning of 5 June 2000, a Ugandan vehicle underway on the Bangoka road was involved in an accident supposedly caused by a Rwandan ambush. Approximately an hour later, heavy cannon- and gunfire erupted in the city again, prompting what became known as the Six-Day War. The RPA units first assaulted and overran Ugandan positions on the northern outskirts


Except for flying their own Mi-35s, the personnel of No. 8 Squadron AFZ regularly serviced and flew Congolese helicopters of this type. This Mi-24K (actually a dedicated artillery fire-correction variant) with serial '9T-HM14' was photographed at Kamina AFB while undergoing maintenance by Zimbabwean personnel. *Photo ZDF*


The rest of No. 8 Squadron AFZ continued flying their faithful AB-412SP Griffons, though their role increasingly became that of troop transport as the war dragged on. *Photo Milpix*


Taken at Kamina AFB after the war, this photograph shows one of four FACA Su-25s. Flown by contracted pilots of Western origin, these saw quite intensive operations during the later stages of the Second Congo War. *Photo Gérard Gaudin*



By the end of 2000, Bemba's MLC was strong enough – and rich enough – to afford to lease helicopters from Victor Bout. Except for this Mi-8P saloon helicopter ('9Q-CBM', c/n 5960, which was destroyed by the FAC in 2006), Bout provided Bemba with at least one Mi-24 helicopter gunship and his own pilots and ground personnel, smuggled into the DRC via Equatorial Guinea in 2001. *Photo Angelo Matari*

A Russian-made bomb that failed to detonate after being dropped by a mysterious aircraft involved in long-range raids against MLC strongholds in northern DRC, on 3 October 2000. Several dozen such strikes were flown over this time, causing not only considerable damage but many casualties. *Photo Todd Pitman, via Pit Weinert*

FAC troops, armed with machine guns and RPG-7s, underway in the Minova area of southern Kivu. Most of the CCR and FDD units operational in the eastern DRC were practically integrated within the FAC during 1999, and wore not only the Congolese uniforms but other insignia to mask their presence. *Photo Jessica Hatcher/IRIN*

of Kisangani. The heavy losses sustained by his troops prompted Kazini to order two mechanized battalions from Camp Kapalata to help. These formed up into a large convoy, including a number of T-55 MBTs, Buffel and Casspir MRAPs and soft-skinned vehicles that drove over the Tshopo Bridge in the direction of the city centre. When the leading vehicles reached the southern side of the bridge, the RPA and ANC opened a murderous fire from several directions. Helplessly exposed, the Ugandans suffered terribly, reportedly losing nearly 1,800 killed and wounded, together with all their weapons.

After learning of the defeat of his major units, Kazini ordered the UPDF artillery, positioned north of the Tshopo, to open fire on Rwandan artillery positions south of the Congo River on 7 May. The Rwandans responded in kind. With so much ordnance flying over the city, serious damage was unavoidable. The power station was heavily damaged, as was the Tshopo hydroelectric dam and one of the hospitals, the cathedral of Kisangani was burned down, water and electricity supplies were destroyed, as were most civilian and commercial properties. Tens of thousands of city residents remained trapped in their homes without food and water for days. The same fate befell the nearly 60,000 civilians who escaped into the nearby jungle. Up to 630 were killed and another 1,000 injured by the time UN observers managed to broker a ceasefire. Due to start at 1600 local time, it was ignored by the troops in the field. Eventually, MONUC, the UN Mission in the DRC, negotiated no less than nine further ceasefires before the fighting finally stopped on 11 June. By that date, the UPDF in Kisangani was thoroughly routed.

Although the government in Kampala never published any details about this defeat, Kazini was not only forced to abandon Bangoka IAP, but was dismissed from his position and replaced by Brigadier-General Kale Kayihura. The Ugandan HQ for operations inside the DRC was withdrawn to Ituri. According to UN sources, the Rwandans suffered around 140 killed in the course of this battle.

MLC advance on Mbandaka

In the Equateur Province, the front was reactivated in May 2000, when the re-established 10 Brigade FAC – under the command of Colonel Mabila and fresh from nine months of training by North Korean instructors in Lubumbashi – supported by FACA Su-25s and Mi-24s, as well as six warships, launched an offensive from Mbandaka along the Lulonga River in a northeasterly direction, aiming to recapture Gbadolite. Initially, the operation was quite successful. It overran the forward defensive positions of the MLC and continued northward for nearly 200km before disaster struck.

On 9 July, the insurgents ambushed a ferry carrying most of 10 Brigade's fire-support battalion from the southern to the northern side of the Congo River. After receiving a mortar hit in the fuel tank, the ship exploded, killing dozens of soldiers and taking with it all the MRLs mortars and anti-aircraft guns. This blow, and numerous MLC ambushes, sapped Congolese morale. After losing over 700 dead and 108 captured, the FAC brigade was forced to withdraw, returning to Mbandaka in early October 2000. To avenge at least some of the losses, but also drive home the message, two FACA Su-25s bombed Gemena on 2 October, a few hours before Bemba was to open official celebrations of the MLC's second anniversary.

After resupplying and receiving reinforcements in the form of a battalion of 600 UNITA troops who had travelled to the DRC via Bangui in the Central African Republic, the MLC opened its offensive in November 2000. Advancing along the Lulonga River in the east and the Ubangui River from the north, it crushed the resistance of the badly shaken FAC, and then overran a battalion of 640 Ugandan and Sudanese fighters of the WNBF led by Sheriff Taban (son of former Ugandan president Idi Amin) that was protecting Mbandanka. The town was taken by the MLC in December.

This MLC success threatened to collapse the entire FAC position in northwestern DRC. Mbandaka is not only a crucially important crossroad, surrounded by a navigable system of tributaries, but also barely four days upriver from Kinshasa. The victory emboldened Bemba into a promise to continue the advance on Kinshasa; even Kampala began considering a return to pursuing a military solution to the war. Therefore the Congolese rushed 15,000 troops to establish a new front south and west of the town, with roughly half of these troops positioned on each side of the Congo River. The western group of forces, which included a newly established battalion of marines, launched an attack in the direction of Nkonya in mid-December,

President Mugabe decorating Major Lizwe Nyathi, the commander of the force that lifted the siege of Ikela. *Photo ZDF*

An FAC Toyota 'technical', equipped with a ZPU-2 anti-aircraft 14.7mm machine gun, endures a typical Congo downpour.
Photo Mark Lepko Collection

eventually reaching a stalemate that saw the towns of Mobambo, Nalangba, Gwanlangu, Poto, Imese and Libanda changing hands several times during January 2001.

Furthermore, the FACA intensified the operations of its Su-25s, targeting not only MLC positions, but also its supply routes. Bridges and storage depots in Basankusu were bombed several times between 25 December 2000 and 10 January 2001, prompting the MLC to erroneously claim that at least two Zimbabwean MiGs had been shot down and their pilots killed. *

The Pweto catastrophe

In early October 2000, the FAC concentrated two motorized infantry brigades, two FDD brigades and one CCR brigade, supported by ZDF artillery and Cascavels in the Pweto area, with the intention of launching an offensive on Pepa. The purpose of this operation remains unclear and it is surprising that the supreme commander of allied forces in the DRC, Zimbabwean Major-General Amos Chingombe, ever agreed to it. By that time the Zimbabweans were tired of fighting, had less than 5,000 troops in the DRC, their economy was on the brink of collapse and there was no longer interest – nor support at home – to re-intensify the war.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the chief of staff FAC, Sylvestre Lwetcha, who continued insisting on supporting the Mayi-Mayi (and was very popular in the Kivus because of this) and his deputy, Dieudonné Kayemby (who actually ran the Congolese military), planned another mass infiltration of Hutu fighters behind the enemy lines and put none other than Joseph Kabila in command of all the units. An alternate version indicates that Kabila wanted to get rid of Anselme Masasu Nindaga and the ex-AFDL *kagodo*, most of whom came from the Kivus.

Although one of the founding members of the AFDL coalition,and a very popular leader of the *kadogo*, Nindaga fell into disfavour with Kabila and was arrested in 1998 under suspicion of plotting a coup. He was released in 2000, and then travelled to the Kivus with the aim of gauging the level of popular support for not only the RCD, but also Kabila's government. He found both highly unpopular. This was not what Kinshasa wanted to hear; therefore, he was sent to Pweto with most of the *kadogo* from the Kivus – who had not been paid or properly fed for months – where they were to bear the brunt of the offensive.†

After severe attacks by FACA Su-25s on ANC front lines and raids by the usual clutch of unknown aircraft on Kalemie and Moba, this offensive was launched on 15 October and was initially successful in achieving its aim. However, the ANC brigade defending Moba, Pepa and Moliro held out, and bought enough time for the RPA to rush reinforcements into the area.

When the news of heavy *kadogo* losses during the operation reached Kinshasa, their colleagues stationed in the capital mutinied, provoking a shootout with the FAC and PIR. Thirty-six mutineers were killed in the fighting, before the others gave up and attempted to flee. Hundreds were arrested and at least 93 – including 60 *kadogo* and 33 civilians, all from the Kivus and Maniema provinces – were subsequently tortured to death or executed. Only 250 survivors managed to reach Brazzaville. Unsurprisingly, Nindaga was assassinated, by unknown assailants, in Pweto on 24 November 2000.

Meanwhile, the Rwandans had rushed two complete brigades from South Kivu. One attacked the FAC/ZDF concentration east of Moba, pinning it down, while the other used an abandoned road to reach and overrun Kapulo, a few kilometres east of Pweto, before making for the Zambian border. With their retreat route cut off, the FAC *kadogo* began defecting in droves, many fleeing across the border into Zambia. Left alone, the demoralized Zimbabweans found no other solution but to follow suit, together with thousands of civilians. Behind them, the FAC had left 33 military vehicles – including one Type-62 light tank, six BTR-60 APCs, two D-30 howitzers and one ambulance truck – while the Zimbabweans lost two Cascavels, both of which had to be sabotaged and abandoned.

The RPA and ANC then pushed toward Pweto, infiltrating the town on 3 December, capturing the local airport with the Mi-17 used to fly in Joseph Kabila and causing panic among the population. While most inhabitants managed to flee, the defenders – largely consisting of the FDD brigade – held out against the Rwandans long enough for fresh ZDF troops – including the entire 1.1 Infantry Battalion and a battalion of the Parachute Group – to be rushed from Harare to establish a new front along the Luva River, farther south.

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* In reaction to the MLC's claim to have shot down its second Zimbabwean MiG on 5 January 2001, the ZDF spokesman finally went so far as to observe (not without some sarcasm) that Zimbabwe could not lose any such aircraft because the AFZ "does not operate MiG planes".

† One of the FAC *kadogos* captured by Rwandans during the battle later explained that they were instructed to shoot their wounded comrades, "because it would be too expensive to fly them out to Lubumbashi".

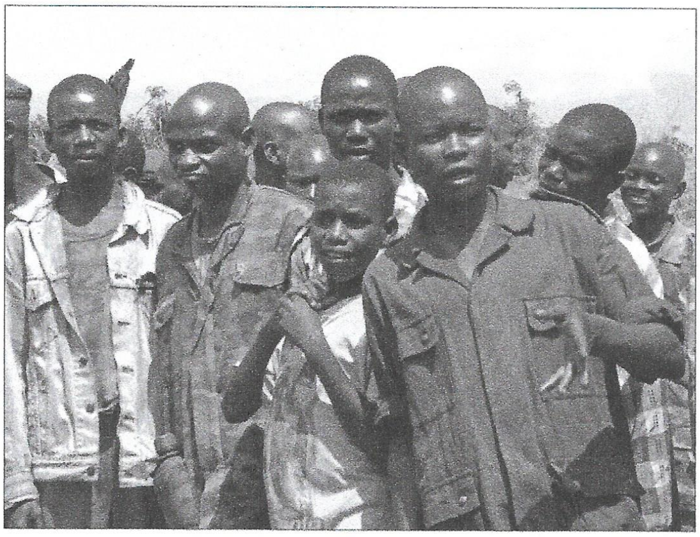
Although the FACA Su-25s continued bombing the Rwandans throughout the battle, the AFZ only appeared late in the skies over Pweto. Indeed, by the time the town fell, operations of AFZ fighter-bombers and combat helicopters were very limited – not only because of an attempt to decrease the Zimbabwean involvement, but primarily because of a change in the rules of engagement, which were now dictated by politics and related to various failed peace treaties. In fact, because of the political implications, the control of AFZ fighter operations was now driven directly from Harare. Furthermore, the Zimbabweans were ever more concerned about the potential threat of Ugandan MiGs, especially if these were to be overhauled and upgraded in Israel. The AFZ Hawk pilots were confident of their ability to outmatch any MiG-21s, but were seriously concerned about the possibility of these being equipped with Israeli-made Python air-to-air missiles, which were clearly superior to their Chinese-made PL-7s. Therefore, the Zimbabweans reacted with a limited number of air strikes, mainly aimed at hitting Rwandan headquarters and supply depots, primarily in the Pweto area, which was bombed several times between 15 December 2000 and 15 January 2001.*

Bush in, Kabila out

At first glance, the fighting in late 2000 appeared to have favoured Rwanda and Uganda. The MLC's capture of Mbandaka, the combined RDF/ANC repulse of the FAC offensive in Katanga, as well as the capture of Pweto, seemingly brought the Rwandans and their allies to the verge of overcoming the stalemate and enabling them to win a military victory. However, regardless of how weak he appeared, Kabila would not bow, and his allies would not accept his (or their) defeat. The common interests between them were much developed and thus they had major incentives to keep on fighting.

Furthermore, international pressure to end fighting increased significantly in the following weeks and months, and there was another major change in regard to Rwanda on the horizon. Namely, in January 2001, US President Bill Clinton was out of office, replaced by George W. Bush. With the end of Clinton's administration, the power of Rwandan supporters in Washington evaporated. When Kagame visited the USA in late January, the new US secretary of state, Colin Powell, made it unmistakably clear that throwing the Lusaka Agreement out the window would not be tolerated, and that the Rwandans should find a peaceful solution to the war. Therefore, the RPA and ANC were forced to stop their intended advance on Lubumbashi.

Something similar happened to the Ugandans and the MLC. Immediately after securing Mbandaka, an emboldened Bemba promised to continue the advance on Kinshasa. This success allowed even Kampala to reconsider pursuing a military solution of the war.


Thousands of *kadogo* – mostly veterans of the AFDL insurgency of 1996/97 – were recruited into the FAC and deployed in combat during the Second Congo War. They usually received an absolute minimum of training and were issued old ex-FAZ uniforms and AK-47 assault rifles. *Photo L. Rose*

After withdrawing some of its units from the DRC during the first half of 2000, the loss of Pweto forced the ZDF to rush significant reinforcements from Harare. These included not only the infantry but also artillery units, some equipped with BM-21 MRLs, as seen here. *Photo ZDF*

However, neither the Ugandans – who were now fighting nearly 1,000km away from their borders – nor the MLC, found a working solution for advancing through the heavily forested and marshy terrain between Mbandaka and Kinshasa. They were perfectly aware of the fact that if they attempted a dash for the capital, for example with an advance by river, this would not only expose them to the Zimbabwean air force, but was also likely to prompt another full-scale Angolan intervention. After finding themselves under pressure from the new US administration, they therefore abandoned all the related ideas.

Furthermore, the new US administration had hardly established itself in Washington when surprising news arrived from Kinshasa. On 16 January, Laurent Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards, the result of an extremely complex plot that remains unresolved.† Amid much insecurity, but with strong Angolan backing, his son Joseph was appointed temporary president on 18 January 2001.

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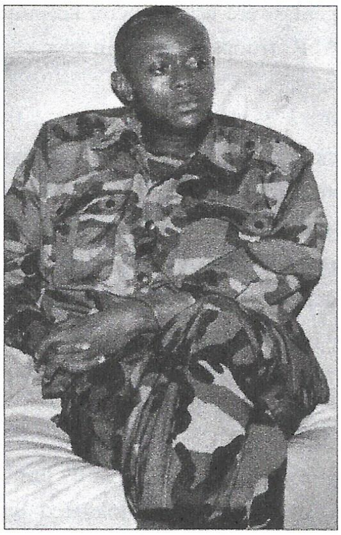
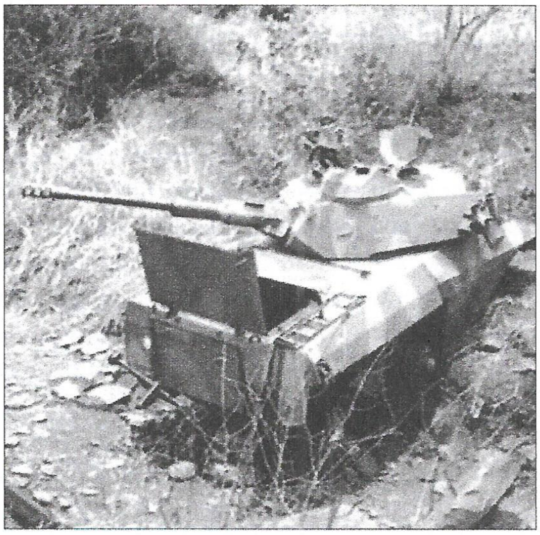
* After one such attack on Pweto, on 8 December 2000, the RPA claimed its last Zimbabwean MiG. Once again, however, this claim proved hollow. Ironically, it was only in January 2001, following Laurent Kabila's death, that the AFZ finally decided to send three Shenyang F-7 fighters (Chinese-manufactured variant of the MiG-21F-13) to the DRC. Scheduled for a flypast during Kabila's funeral, the aircraft experienced a number of problems while underway from Gweru AFB in Zimbabwe to Lubumbashi, and never reached Kinshasa. Due to bad weather, all three were forced to make emergency landings, in the process of which one F-7 was written off. Unknown to the public is that this negative experience supported the views of AFZ officers who strongly opposed the idea of deploying this type of aircraft in the Congo.

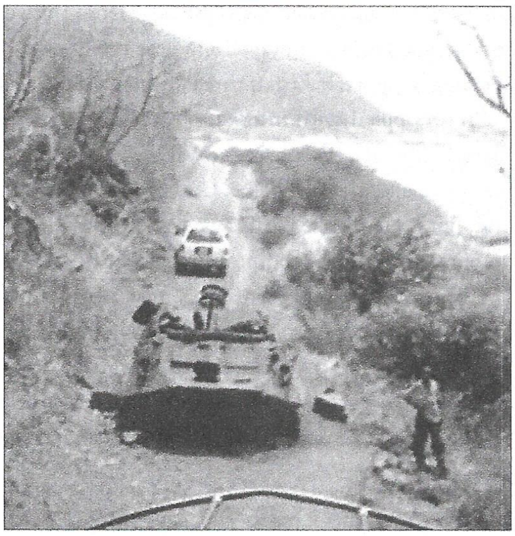
† Over 200 people allegedly involved were subsequently prosecuted, and 26 of them were sentenced to death by several successive military courts. (Among those sentenced to death were some of the judges who had issued the death penalties.). However, no one was ever executed.



Anselme Masasu Nindaga, leader of the ex-AFDL *kadogo*, a victim of political intrigue and violence. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*



A ZDF Cascavel abandoned during the battle of Pweto. The vehicle was sabotaged and then pushed into a gorge. *Photo Florin Lapusneanu*



This FAC BTR-60 was knocked out by the Rwandans near the Luva River. *Photo Florin Lapusneanu*

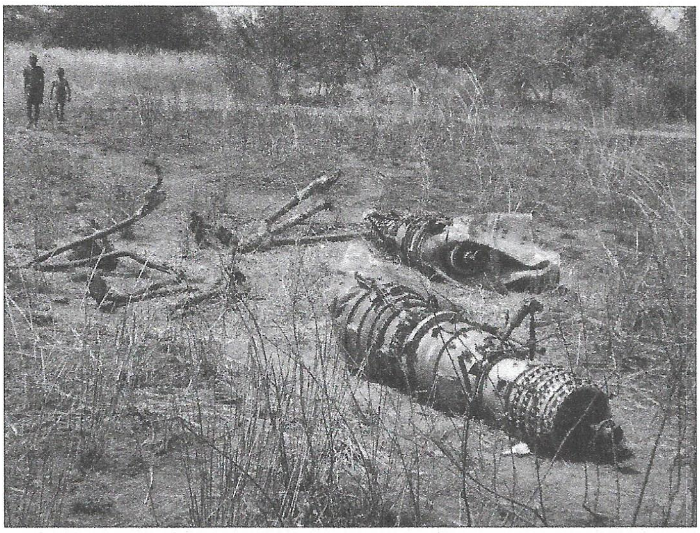
The Kabila doctrine

At 29, Joseph Kabila was politically inexperienced and without his own tribal constituencies, as he had grown up outside the Congo. Nevertheless, he soon proved a modern variant of Machiavelli. Knowing full well what he wanted, he was clearly ready to do what it took to get it. Within a few days he began to skilfully manoeuvre on the international diplomatic scene – while simultaneously arresting and prosecuting hundreds of political and military opponents at home. By surrounding himself with his own advisers, he quickly made his rule independent of any foreign influence, thus securing his position.

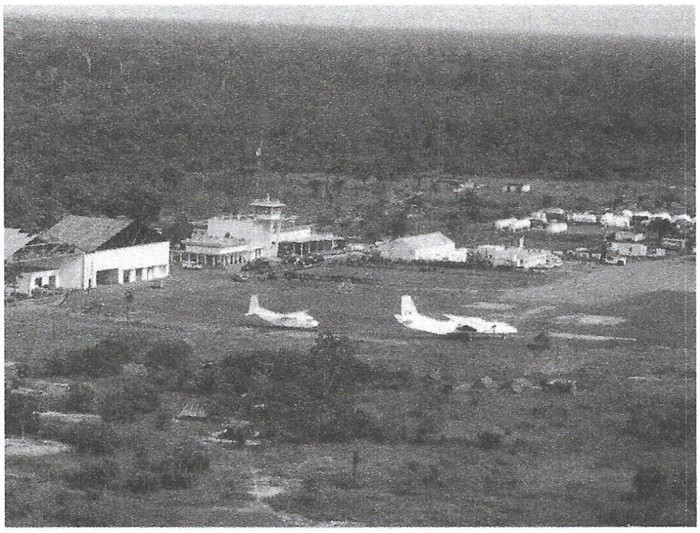
On 2 February, Joseph Kabila called for Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi to withdraw their armies, promising that Angolan, Namibian and Zimbabwean troops would be withdrawn as soon as stability was restored. Contrary to his father, Joseph Kabila also agreed to meet rebel leaders (and did so for the first time in August 2001), thus opening the way for – lengthy and complex – but successful peace negotiations.

Most of Kabila's allies supported him wholeheartedly. In Harare, Mugabe was keen to end his military involvement in the DRC. By then, the Zimbabwean economy, already in tatters from other influences, could simply not support the costs of the war that was not proving to be self-financing as had originally been envisaged. The Namibians too were keen to withdraw – and did so in September 2001 – while the Angolans found themselves taken by surprise through a series of measures undertaken by Joseph Kabila that left them with little influence in the DRC. However, satisfied that the new government in Kinshasa would not support UNITA, and that most of their economic interests remained protected, they even offered to reinforce their military presence that had been significantly limited since 1999.*

With members of his government and top military officers still primarily interested in exploiting the Congolese mineral wealth, instead of advancing on Kinshasa, President Museveni found himself



Taken outside Pweto, this shows the wreckage of a Klimov (Isotov) TV3-117 turboshaft engine, which usually powers Mi-24 helicopter gunships. Because neither the AFZ nor the FACA are known to have lost any helicopters of this type, this engine seems to have belonged to the Rwandans, the helicopter seemingly shot down during the fighting in November 2000. *Photo via Guido Potters*



Mbandaka airport in 2004. This installation was regularly used by the AFZ and FACA combat and transport aircraft, until captured by the MLC in late 2000. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection* on the receiving end of much pressure from abroad. By 2001, Uganda was exporting so much Congolese gold and diamonds, that its Western supporters began threatening to cut their financial aid.

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* Angola withdrew all except two mechanized FAA regiments from the Congo in April 1999. However, after crushing UNITA and even capturing its capital in Jamba in December that year, Luanda was once again free to deploy large contingents of its army to the DRC.

Preoccupied with internal power struggles, the Burundians had played only a minor role in the war so far and thus did not stand in the way of an end to the conflict. Overall, the time was ripe for the war to end, but, until all the parties were prepared to enter negotiations, and were ready to accept compromises, fighting would continue.

However, finding themselves incapable of earning any profits from their victories in Kisangani (where the Ugandans remained in possession of the diamond mines) and Pweto, the Rwandans remained eager to pursue the military solution and made their withdrawal dependent on multiple conditions.

Operation Lord's Oracle

One element of Joseph Kabila's doctrine was to return the favour to Rwanda for its support of the RCD and other anti-government insurgent groups. Although ordering a significant expansion of the FAC – from around 36,000 to more than 45,000 troops – and integrating a sizeable contingent of Rwandan, Burundian and Congolese Hutus within its ranks, the new Congolese president decided to abandon attempts to win the war by conventional military means. Instead, he ordered an intensification of the CCR's infiltration efforts into the Rwandan-controlled Kivus. Wholeheartedly supported by his chief of staff and former Mayi-Mayi insurgent, Lwetcha, this decision soon resulted in a massive intensification of anti-Rwandan insurgent activity, which nearly broke the back of the RPA

As such, the ALiR continued attacking the Rwandans and ANC throughout the Kivus for the rest of the war. By August 2001, the idea was born to launch attacks into Rwanda as well, with the objective of forcing the RPA to redeploy its overstretched forces closer to its borders, thereby demonstrating its inability to protect its own territory. Therefore, the 1st Division ALiR was strengthened with airdrops of armaments from Kinshasa, and then ordered to move 5,000 fighters out of its hideouts in the Masisi region into Rwanda.

For obvious reasons, this operation – codenamed Lord's Oracle – was marred with extensive problems from the start. The ALiR lacked suitable transportation and its fighters had to march hundreds of kilometres over rugged terrain. Added to this, it proved practically impossible to clandestinely move such a volume of armed men over extensive distances. There was also a power struggle between ALiR and FDLR leaders, primarily caused by the efforts of ALiR commander Pierre-Claver Habimana to become the commander in chief of the new unified army. Whether by design, as affirmed by some Rwandan exiles, or for other reasons, Lord's Oracle was revealed to Kigali, resulting in a catastrophe. Habimana was captured by the RPA while attempting to take direct control of the men at the front, and the 1st Division was utterly defeated, losing around 2,100 fighters, nearly half of them killed. Some 500 remained in Rwanda, while 400 deserted and formed uncontrollable gangs. Only around 200 survivors returned to North Kivu. Instead of prompting an uprising inside Rwanda, this operation resulted in the demise of the ALiR. Its few scattered units in North Kivu were forced to leave the area and join the 2nd Division in South Kivu. This unit was subsequently integrated into the FDLR.

Despite this failure, the Kinshasa continued pursuing the strategy of infiltrating the Rwandan-controlled Kivus, and, by the end of the year, 15,000 Rwandan Hutu insurgents were active there, keeping more than 20,000 RPA and 30,000 ANC troops busier than ever.

Chaotic end to the war

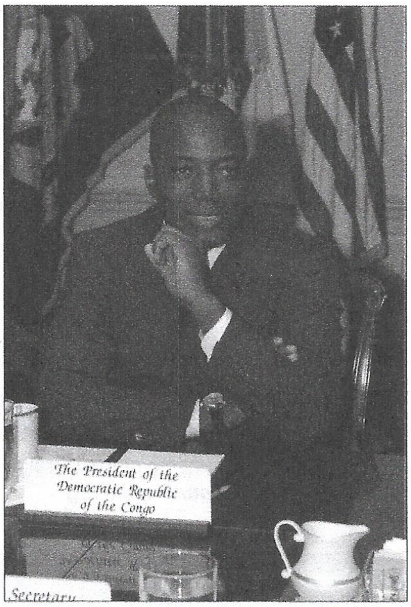
A proper description of the nearly endless series of conferences and negotiations, searching for a ceasefire and post-war solutions for the DRC, that took place anywhere between New York and Johannesburg in late 2001 and early 2002 would require a separate volume of this size. Suffice to say that the most crucial of them was the meeting of 11 April 2002, in the course of which Joseph Kabila's government and various rebel factions agreed to integrate the FAC with various rebel forces into a new national army.

The FDLR remained a problem, it was not Congolese by origin, and it refused to return to Rwanda – even though some of its units actually cooperated with the RPA, or were at least tolerated by it. Similarly, although signing all the agreements, the Rwandans remained unimpressed and continued finding reasons not to withdraw their forces from the DRC. Kigali also remained merciless in dealing with any kind of dissent. On 14 May 2002, part of the ANC garrison in Kisangani – foremost ex-FAZ soldiers – mutinied against their Rwandan officers and their RPA minders. Although poorly organized, the mutineers managed to reach the local radio station and air their call to "throw the Rwandans out of the Congo", which immediately made them popular. The ANC and RPA reacted with brutal suppression. Late that afternoon an An-12 arrived from Goma, bringing 216 Rwandan regulars to reinforce 5 and 7 brigades ANC, commanded by Barnard Biamungu and Laurent Nkunda, respectively. Led by the ANC's chief of staff logistics, Gabriel Amisi, this force quickly overpowered and disarmed the mutineers. One hundred and sixty-three of them were brought to the Tshopo Bridge and summarily executed and their bodies thrown into the water.

Another round of talks resulted in the Sun City Agreement of 22 July 2002, at which the Congolese and Rwandan leaders again agreed to end the war. Initially rejected by the RCD, this was formally accepted by all sides on 30 July 2002, and has ever since been considered crucial in prompting the withdrawal of foreign forces involved in the Second Congo War. Zimbabwe and Uganda accepted the Sun City Agreement in early September and announced their troop withdrawals. The Namibian contingent had already withdrawn in September 2001. Despite his promise, Kagame was slow to act; it was only after a tripartite meeting between presidents Bush, Kabila and Kagame in New York, on 16 September 2002, that Rwanda announced a withdrawal of its forces "within a week". Surprisingly, the RPA indeed pulled out this time, albeit within a month. Furthermore, it brought back only 20,941 men out of 23,760 supposedly deployed in the DRC. The rest were declared either sick or absent without a leave.

In fact, many of the RPA troops left behind joined the ranks of the ANC, which had its hands full fighting the Mayi-Mayi and FDLR who were now roaming all over the Kivu and Maniema provinces. The insurgents even managed to take Kindu, forcing the ANC to launch a counterattack in order to retake the city. Subsequently, its troops carried out a systematic massacre of whomever they assumed had collaborated with the Mayi-Mayi. Before long, Kindu was again besieged by the militias, as were Shabunda, Fizi, Walungu and many other ANC garrisons. In October 2002, the Mayi Mayi took Uvira and announced their march on Bukavu. The RPA/AW was forced to use

All FDLR infiltrations behind ANC/RPA front lines were covered by intense fire from the Congolese and Zimbabwean artillery. Here ZDF gunners prepare a Chinese-made 107mm multiple-rocket launcher. *Photo ZDF*



Joseph Kabila's administration of the Democratic Republic of Congo reflected Theodore Roosevelt's statement, "Speak softly but carry a big stick". He revamped the political scene in Kinshasa, and much of the FAC, creating the image of an able, competent statesman at home and abroad, but also effectively liberating himself from any kind of foreign influence. *Photo US DoD*

all its helicopters and transport aircraft to distribute reinforcements in South Kivu and provide fire support to their isolated ground units. (The AFZ again launched several offensive patrols, but Hawk pilots did not intercept any helicopters known to have been underway). It was only on 18 March 2003, after the government signed a ceasefire with various tribal militias and local chiefs in the Kivus, that these provinces experienced at least some semblance of peace.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
CONCLUSION

Tragically, the Second Congo War degenerated into a number of ethnic conflicts that erupted before the war ended. The Sun City peace agreement resulted in the establishment of a transitional government under international supervision, presided over by Joseph Kabila, which was to guarantee former belligerents some measure of control of the state and its resources. However, it also left representatives of civil society and other constituencies with little influence, and thus offered little incentive for most top military figures, rebel leaders and warlords to begin the arduous task of tackling the root causes of the war, end the impunity that crucial figures enjoyed and institute the rule of law. For this reason and for the myriad reasons that have plagued it from independence, the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains a country impossible to administrate.

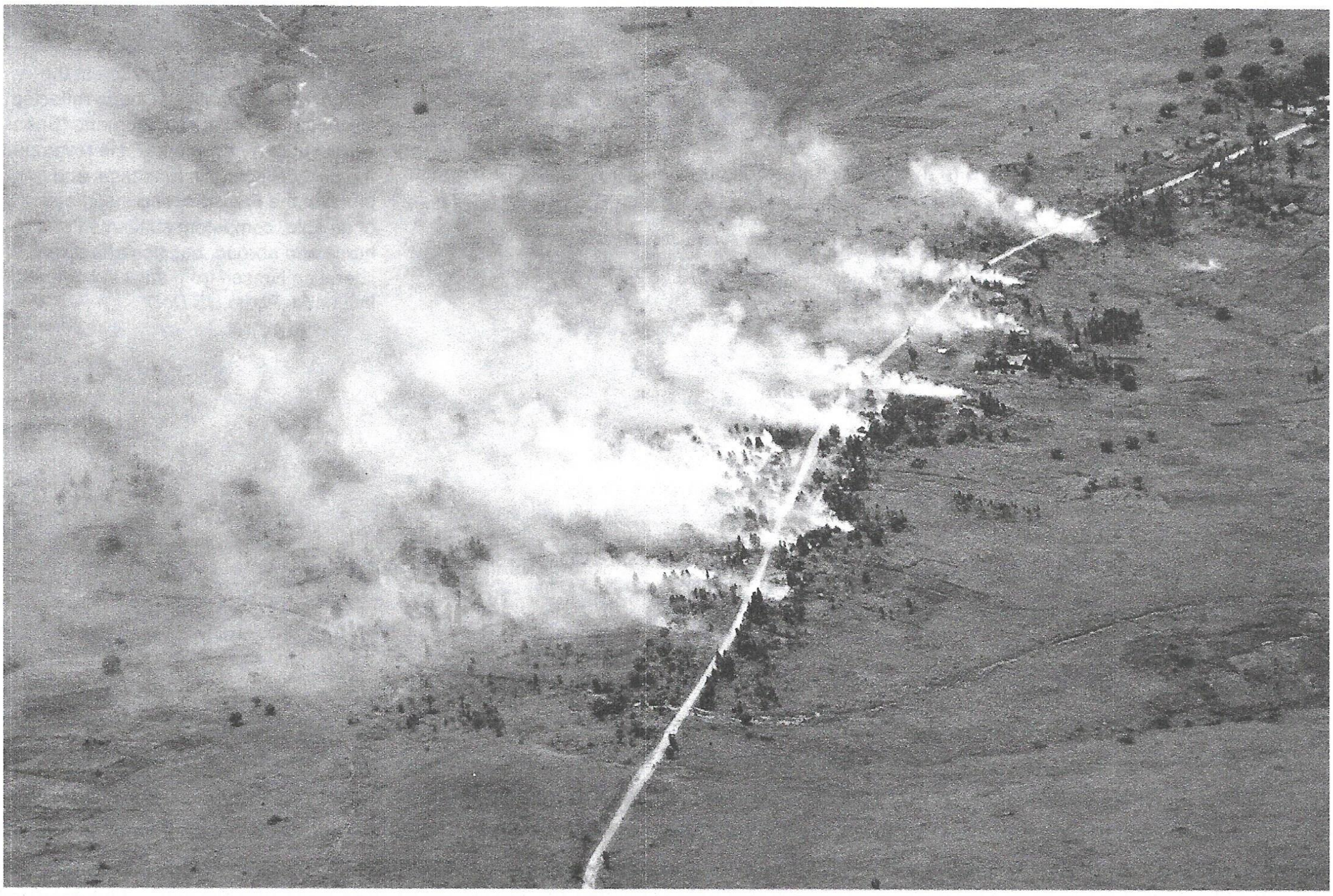
Amid much international pressure, the UN established a peacekeeping force, named the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), after the Lusaka Peace Accord in 1999. MONUC received the mandate to enforce the ceasefire agreements, monitor and report on the belligerents' disengagement from the front lines, assist in the process of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration, and facilitate the transition to democratic governance. During the mid-2000s, the UN invested much in this mission; at one point the MONUC grew to the biggest peacekeeping operation in the world, with almost 20,000 UN troops on the ground who played a key role in organizing the 2006 democratic elections which ended the transitional period. However, UN involvement did almost nothing to quell the violence. On the contrary, in not a few cases the supposed peacekeepers not only ignored various armed groups, but actually became involved in atrocities against civilians.

The UN mission failed and the war soon continued for other reasons and by different means, firstly in the Ituri District of Orientale Province and then in the Kivus. Augmented by the government's failure to investigate the massacres of hundreds of Banyamulenge soldiers at the start of the Second Congo War and its continued support for the FDLR, former ANC military commanders repeatedly resisted the integration of their units into the FAC. This required soldiers from all regions to report to central training locations from whence they would be deployed as necessary for the protection of the country. This meant that former ANC officers and other ranks might find themselves under the command of their former enemies, and deployed 2,000km from home. Effectively in control of most of the natural resources in the Kivus, despite the RPA's withdrawal in 2002, the leadership in Kigali was not keen to see the emergence of a strong, unified Congolese military either. Therefore, it reinforced and backed ex-ANC commanders; whenever one of them mutinied he could count on support from Rwanda in the form of arms, ammunition, supplies, additional recruits and funding.

This was especially the case with Laurent Nkunda, already responsible for widespread atrocities and war crimes during the Second Congo War and after its cessation. In 2004, he refused to

Mi-24P helicopter gunship of the Ukrainian contingent assigned to the MONUC. *Photo UNmultimedia.org*

Re-painted white, most Mi-17 helicopters of what is now the Rwanda Air Force, have recently been deployed in support of the UN contingent in Somalia. *Photo UNmultimedia.org*



A village in the Bunia area, burning after another attack and massacre in one of countless attacks launched during the course of ethnic conflicts that followed the supposed end of the Second Congo War. *Photo UNmultimedia.org*

deploy to Kinshasa and insisted on remaining in control of ANC brigades in North Kivu and then launched a new rebellion, provoking the so-called Ituri War that resulted in the increased suffering of the local population. This ended in 2008, after even Kigali turned against Nkunda; ever since, he has been held under house arrest in Rwanda. The cooperation between Kinshasa and Kigali, that ended the Ituri War, collapsed four years later when Rwanda began supporting another group of mutineers with Banyamulenge backgrounds, named M23, the underlying motives of whom being little other than personal privileges.

The fact remains that despite massive and the almost non-violent participation of the Congolese in the electoral process of 2006, which sent a clear message to the ruling cliques, the population remains divided between competing ethnic groups and commercial interests, and the country's natural wealth continues to attract unscrupulous corporations, vicious warlords and corrupt governments. Furthermore, while much of the DRC has found peace and the central government is slowly reasserting control, and although much reconstruction work has been undertaken in some of the major cities and the economy in some areas is thriving again, generally very few political reforms have materialized. The reconstruction of roads, railways and airports proceeds at an agonizingly slow pace, and the Congolese military is still neither completely integrated, nor united, nor capable of properly protecting its long and porous borders and thus the territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Under these circumstances, further violent conflicts are practically a given.

A soldier of the South African National Defence Force deployed with the UN contingent in the eastern DRC. *Photo Finbarr O'Reilly*

Rwandan failures and Ugandan misery

Like the First World War in Europe, the Second Congo War was based on a series of miscalculations by crucial political and military figures that resulted in untold pain for millions of people. Because of this, and because of the involvement, directly or indirectly, of a number of different African states, this conflict is often called the First African War.

Indeed, even under close scrutiny, military-related decision-making by crucial parties was fraught with mistakes, starting as early as the Kitona operation. While a bold idea, the plan for this operation was based on the erroneous assumption that – like Mobutu before him – Kabila would not prove successful in obtaining foreign military and diplomatic support. Due to ignorance of possible repercussions from Angolan intervention, and because of a complete miscalculation of Zimbabwean involvement, this operation was doomed from the start. Kabarebe's advance on Kinshasa was slower than expected and was then smashed by the Zimbabweans, and when the Angolans appeared in his rear, there was no chance of success, no matter how enthusiastic the Rwandans were. Advancing into eastern Congo, the rest of the RDF was hopelessly incapable of reinforcing this effort.

With this, the entire Rwandan plan for the war collapsed. However, instead of realizing the seriousness of the Zimbabwean, Angolan and Namibian military threat, and while completely ignoring the antagonism of the Congolese population toward their presence, the Rwandans then made their next mistake: continuing the war through a classic advance on Kinshasa. On a tactical level the RPA's offensives on Kisangani, Kindu, Mbuji-Mayi and south thereof were again characterized by imaginative solutions, high-speed manoeuvre, great capacity to improvise, excellent exploitation of the element of surprise and some success against extreme odds. However, in the face of bitter resistance, and especially Zimbabwean COIN expertise, the RPA not only suffered extensive losses, but was forced to fight a battle of attrition that its logistic system could simply not support. The result was that the Rwandans never reached the open terrain between Mbuji-Mayi and Kinshasa, and could not rely on Angolan support – both of which would have provided them with a quick advance on the capital, as in 1997.

Preoccupied with collecting the bounty from the DRC, military commanders in Kigali then made their next mistake: ignoring the fact that their timing was misplaced. After all the atrocities they had committed against defenceless Hutu refugees and the Congolese population during 1996–2001, there was next to no popular support for new Rwandan rebels – the RCD – and their brutal suppression of any opposition only incited more resistance from the population. It is ironic that the RPA, spawn of an insurgency, was nearly brought to its knees by different Congolese and Rwandan insurgent groups in 2001 and 2002. Indeed, it is incredulous that although they failed to topple Kabila or defeat any foreign contingents, the Rwandan military commanders remain convinced they won the war.

Considering all that has been mentioned, it is easy to conclude that the Ugandans fared far better during the war – probably because of their uncompromising attitude. The UPDF advanced deep into the northern DRC early on, but once the Chadians stopped them, the Ugandans took a break to organize their 'Congolese face' – in the form of the MLC – while overcoming the Chadian obstacle. After the Chadian withdrawal, the UPDF only supported the MLC with heavy weapons, and did not let itself get involved in large-scale operations. Considering the degree to which Kampala subsequently lost control over its military to looting, and considering previous Ugandan experience from fighting Rwandans in Kigali, this was

Banyamulenge soldiers that mutinied against the government in Kinshasa and established themselves as M23, brought large parts of North Kivu under their control, in 2012. *Photo Mark Lepko Collection*

not the Ugandan military's finest hour, although it did prove to be the most economical solution to waging what had become a war of attrition. It is regrettable that in the light of the Ugandan military's preoccupation with fighting the LRA in Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Congo, and its involvement with the UN in its war against Islamic extremist in Somalia, as well as the refusal of the UPDF's ranking commanders to be publicly transparent about its deployment in the Second Congo War, one is left to wonder whether the Ugandans have ever objectively studied the myriad lessons of the Second Congo War.

Angolan fame and Zimbabwean shame

Another irony of the Second Congo War is the emphasis on concern over the firepower of the Angolan military, obvious in nearly every Rwandan or rebel account available. There is little doubt that a single FAA mechanized regiment possessed more firepower than an entire RPA brigade. However, except in Bas-Congo during the early stages of the conflict, the Angolans were seldom involved in large-scale battles, and then usually only to prop up the front lines of collapsing FAC units. Similarly, the number of occasions where Rwandan, ANC or MLC participants recollect the crucial involvement of Angolan MiGs is simply astounding – considering that these never operated over the DRC. By comparison, most Rwandan and Ugandan accounts tend to completely ignore, or are outright disparaging of the Zimbabwean military performance. One can only guess whether the reason for this is based on ignorance or denial of the many blows they received from the ZNA and AFZ. What is certain is that the Angolans received much fame for their performance during the Second Congo War, when there was actually very little to show for this. It was, however, very early during the war that Zimbabwean officers were put in overall command of the FAC, FAA, NDF and allied operations, and it was they who exhibited outstanding performance, despite time restraints, a lack of resources, unreliable and shaky allies, and often wholly inadequate intelligence.

While making a number of mistakes and being continually dwarfed by the Congo's sheer size, remoteness, rugged terrain, poor communications and a numerically superior enemy, they showed great skill in their effective use of firepower and of manoeuvring their small units. They also managed to keep their units well supported and supplied, even when cut off deep behind enemy lines. It was because of this performance that the Zimbabwean military suffered surprisingly few losses – less than 600 killed – in three years of bitter war, while not only accomplishing the objective of its deployment, i.e. safeguarding Kabila's government in Kinshasa, but also imposing a heavy attrition on its enemies.*

Furthermore, it is usually ignored that for most of the war the ZDF contingent in the DRC was half the size of the RPA's; during the first six crucial months of the war, the Zimbabweans also had far fewer troops in the Congo than the Angolans. Indeed, considering that the ZDF did not make use of foreign PMCs for logistic support, and that only about 6,000 Zimbabweans were combat troops – others served with HQs, logistics, as instructors for the FAC and other contingents, or serviced heavy equipment – and considering the number of troops the ANC was regularly adding to Rwandan operations, ZDF troops usually faced odds of up to 1 to 10 on the battlefield.

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* Based on post-mission inspections of various battlefields, several ZDF studies regarding experiences during the Second Congo War have established that Zimbabwean troops maintained a kill:loss ratio of no less than 27:1 for most of 1998–2001.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the ZDF's subsequent – and highly controversial – involvement in domestic politics, Zimbabwean combat troops instead face an array of disparaging opinion in the public eye. Frustrated, many of them have left the service in shame and refuse to talk about their combat experiences. The situation is not improving because many observers prefer to discuss the ZDF's supposedly abysmal low morale and poor technical condition, instead of taking a closer look at the facts: although repeatedly forced to withdraw – usually when fighting against great odds – the average Zimbabwean carried on with his duty with typical stoicism, discipline and frugality. Suffice to say that the Zimbabweans were never involved in acts of atrocities against civilians, and none of them face charges of war crimes – which is exactly the case with most of the other belligerents, including the supposed victors of the conflict.

Perhaps some of this can be attributed to the very same reasons for most armed conflicts of this nature: ignorance, arrogance, prejudice and lack of communication.

Right: RDF troops shortly before deployment to the Sudan. Rwanda continues to enjoy financial support from the West, especially the USA, due to the need for a launchpad for allied troops to African states in crisis. The former RPA was reorganized as the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) and retrained for peacekeeping purposes. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

The reorganization of the FAC, into the FARDC (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*), remains marred by massive disagreements between its commanders, the political leadership in Kinshasa and repeated mutinies. Despite the provision of US military aid – primarily with regard to training – the Congolese military remains unable to complete its main objective, which is the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the DRC. Here FARDC troops, trained by US instructors, step out during their pass-out parade. *Photo US DoD/AFRICOM*

Bibliography

The First and Second Congo Wars took place from 1996–97 and 1998–2003 respectively and remain highly pertinent in terms of Central Africa's modern history. Neither of the two conflicts changed anything in regard to human rights, press freedom or access to official documentation in the relevant countries. On the contrary, many participants have meanwhile been forced to leave their homelands, rightly concerned about their safety, and finding no other solution but to request asylum in the European Union. It is because of this, that while much of the material compiled during the preparation of this publication is based on interviews with first-hand participants of the Congo Wars, these were obtained on the basis of absolute anonymity. Other participants became involved in the conflicts through their active military service, or employment with various foreign air freight companies or private military companies. While some of them have since retired, their freedom to speak openly remains limited. On the other hand, all the US, Rwandan, Ugandan and some British officials contacted in the research stages of this publication refused to offer any commentary, citing "matters of national security" and "official secrets" as reasons for their silence. Nevertheless, all contributions have proved precious and enabled the author to cross-examine the following publications (as well as those mentioned in footnotes), consulted during the writing of this book.

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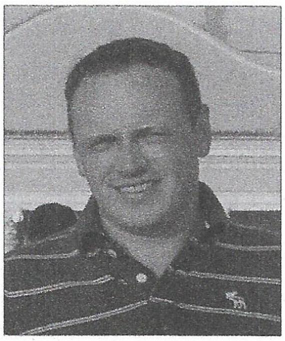

Tom Cooper, from Austria, is a military-aviation journalist and historian. Following a career in a worldwide transportation business – where, during his extensive travels in Europe and the Middle East, he established excellent contacts with many first-hand sources – he moved into writing. An earlier fascination with post-Second World War military aviation has narrowed to focus on smaller air forces and conflicts, about which he has collected extensive archives of material. Concentrating primarily on air warfare, which has previously received scant attention, he specializes in investigative research on little-known African and Arab air forces, as well as the Iranian Air Force. Cooper has published 14 books – including the unique 'African MiGs' series, which examines the deployment and service history of MiG and Sukhoi jet fighters in 23 sub-Saharan African air forces – as well as over 200 articles on related topics, providing a window into a number of previously unexamined yet fascinating conflicts and relevant developments. *Great Lakes Holocaust: The First Congo War, 1996–1997* and *Great Lakes Conflagration: The Second Congo War, 1998–2003* are his first offerings to the Africa@War series.

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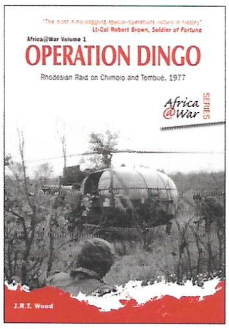
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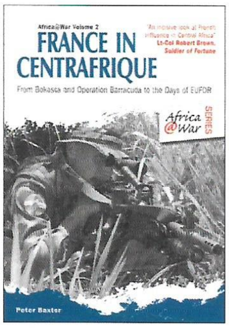
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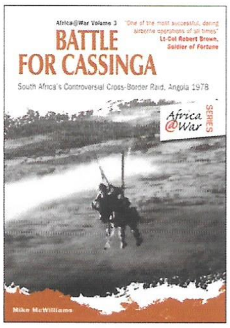
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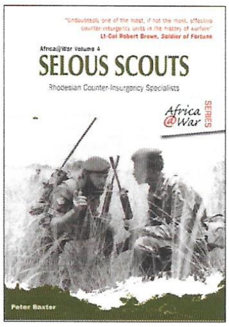
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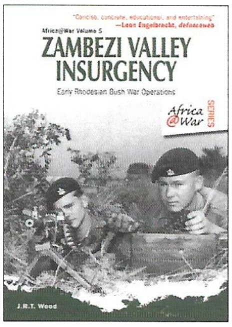
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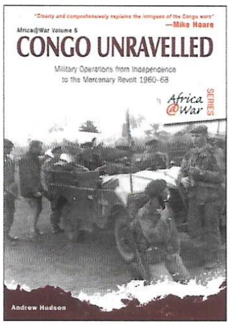
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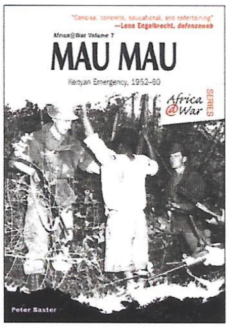
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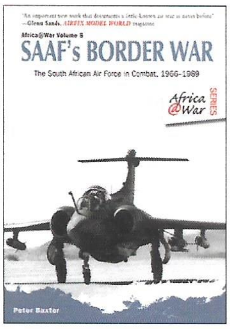
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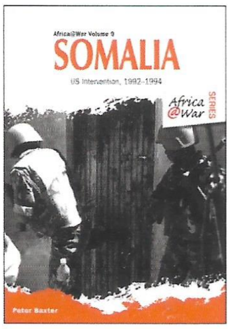
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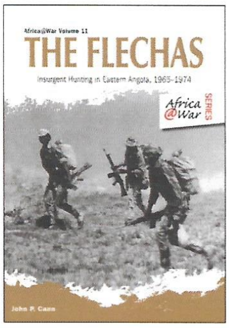
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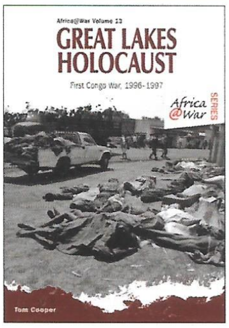
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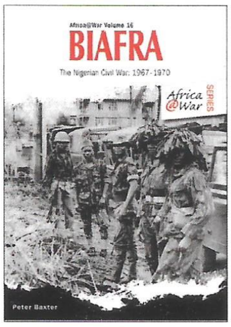
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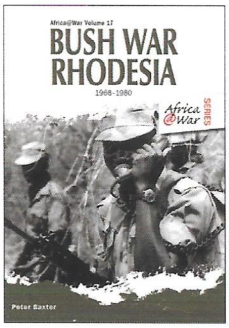
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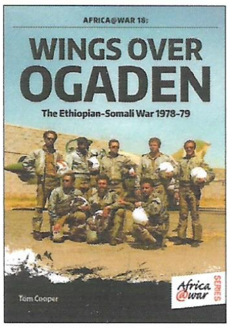
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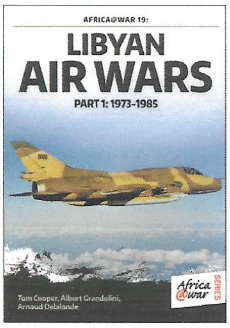
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